

GREEK CALENDAR CUSTOMS

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By

GEORGE A. MEGAS

Professor at the University of Athens;
Hon. Director of Folklore Archives,
Academy of Athens.

SECOND EDITION

ATHENS

1963

THE present book was written with the intention of providing foreign visitors to Greece with a compendium of the feasts and religious customs of the Greek people.

The Greeks are a deeply religious nation and their religious observances are worthy of special study. Many of these reveal a continuity which, despite their present Christian garb, links them with the most distant past of antiquity.

The significance of popular forms of worship for the proper understanding of a people's religion is very great, both because, in these acts of worship, the religious instincts of the faithful find outward expression, and because these practices, in which the faith of simple peasants expresses itself, are the most persistent form of religion. This explains why so many of the Greek people's religious customs are of ancient origin and represent a mere survival of the ancient Greek popular religion of which Martin Nilsson's admirable work «Greek Popular Religion» (Columbia University Press, 1940) gives us so accurate a picture.

Nilsson writes on page 5 : «In trying to understand Greek popular religion we must start from the agricultural and pastoral life of the countryside, which was neither very advanced nor very primitive culturally. The Greek peasant usually lived in a large village. Many ancient cities with names familiar in history were but villages similar to those found in Greece today...» and on page 102 : «The cults of the countryside certainly do not exhibit the gods in

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FOREWORD

Knowledge of a people is acquired through an adequately long stay in their country, during which observations are made as to their habits and customs. Where no such opportunity presents itself, the deficiency may, up to a certain point, be supplied by literature. This book, then, is intended to give a picture, albeit a cursory one, of the manners and customs of the Greek people, with particular reference to their beliefs and modes of worship.

The Greek people have lived for the past 3,000 years and more in the south-eastern corner of Europe with its adjacent islands.

Barbarian hordes periodically invaded Greece and wrought great destruction there. But never once did those who chanced to remain behind subsequent to any barbarian invasion, particularly during the Middle Ages (Goths, Huns, Avars, Slavs, Normans), succeed in acquiring political and military cohesion and strength so as to assure themselves an independent life and existence in the midst of the Greek population.

Later, the Turkish conquest made further inroads and was a fresh drain on what may be termed the body of Greece, but the spirit of Greece remained unimpaired throughout this long period of bondage. Certainly no people, the Greeks included, is racially pure. Thus, in the mid-14th and early 15th centuries, Albanian T o s k s from southern Albania came and settled, but not as the result of war or rebellion, in south-eastern Greece (Boeotia, Attica, Corinthia, Argolis). These were Orthodox Christians and, in their habits and customs, did not greatly differ from the Greeks; in this way they soon fused with the indigenous Greeks.

This explains how the Greek language has been preserved up to

the present day as the pure and unadulterated offspring of ancient Greek, just as it also explains how in the life, intellectual and social, of the Greek people today there are many beliefs and customs which are a survival from the life and civilization of ancient Greece.

It follows that understanding of Greek customs must often entail reference to the past; for only in this way is it possible to acquire knowledge of the early forms and of the reason for the existence of certain of these customs, as well as of their evolution and connexion with similar customs belonging to other peoples. Only in this way is it possible to distinguish between what is peculiar to the Greek people and what may have been borrowed or inherited in common from other kindred peoples with whom the Greeks were intermingled many ages ago.

Unfortunately, during recent years, wars and persecution have exterminated large numbers of Greeks or have uprooted them from their ancestral homes in Northern and Eastern Thrace, Northern Epirus, Pontus, Cappadocia and the rest of Asia Minor. These successive and pitiful waves of persecuted refugees have overflowed into the narrow boundaries of Greece proper. To-day the memory of those ancient seats of Greek culture survives only in the minds and souls of the displaced inhabitants from Smyrna, Aivali, Trebizond, Caesarea, Adrianople, Anchialos and other places whose name is legion. Thus Greece, in the wider sense of the Greek world, is not, from the ethnographical point of view, limited to the narrow boundaries of the Greek State as it now is, but stretches, culturally speaking, as far as those eastern countries where, for centuries, Greek was spoken and Greek civilization flourished.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD.	7
INTRODUCTION	13

WINTER FESTIVALS

I. FROM ST. DEMETRIUS' DAY (OCT. 26) TO ST. PHILIP'S DAY	19
II. FROM ST. PHILIP'S TO CHRISTMAS. SHORT LENT	21
III. THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS	27
IV. FROM ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST'S DAY TO CARNIVAL	52

SPRING FESTIVALS

I. CARNIVAL (APOKREOS)	59
II. LENT (MEGALI SARAKOSTI)	75
III. EASTER HOLIDAYS	87
IV. MAY	116

SUMMER FESTIVALS

I. JUNE	131
II. JULY	139
III. AUGUST	145

AUTUMN FESTIVALS

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER.	153
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ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. I 1. Sacrifice of a bull in one village of the northeastern Thrace. Blessing of the victim by the priest (p. 144). Photograph by G. A. Megas (20 July 1910).
2. The sacrifice.
3. Procession of St. Spyridon's relic in Corfu (p. 26). Photograph by G. A. Megas (11th August 1956).
- Pl. II 1. Children singing Christmas carols (p. 27). Photograph by V. Papaioannou, Athens.
2. Decorated Christmas bread from Candia, Crete (p. 29). Photograph by the Folklore Archives of the Academy of Athens.
3. Decorated Easter bread from Candia (p. 96). Photograph by the Folklore Archives of the Academy of Athens.
- Pl. III The blessing of the sea on Epiphany Day in Piraeus:
1. General view of the port.
2. The ceremony of the throwing of the Cross into the sea (pp. 50-51). Photographs by the Πρακτορείον Ἠνωμένων Φωτορεπόρτερ, Athens.
- Pl. IV 1. A Groop of Mummers, the «Rhogatsaria», from the Twelve Days of Christmas in Thessaly (1957).
2. An Arab mask of sheep-skin used by the «Rhogatsia» in the village Megas-Palamas, Thessaly (1958).
3. A mask of hare-skin used in Karaghiozi's wedding at Gonoussa (old Sicyon), Corinthia (1957). Photographs by G. Doulas, Ch. Tsimas and B. Calphantis.
- Pl. V 1. Symbolic ploughing by a «Kalogheros» in the village of St. Helen on Cheese-Monday, 1952 (p. 65). Photograph by Caterina Cacouri.
2. Four youths impersonating oxen and falling on the ground to bring good luck, as the villagers say (p. 65). Photograph by Caterina Cacouri.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. VI Kite-flying and picnic in Athens on Clean Monday (p. 73). Photographs by the Πρακτορείον Ἠνωμ. Φωτορεπόρτερ.
- Pl. VII The «Peasant Wedding» at Thebes on Clean Monday (1954).
1. The nuptial dance. The bride, a man disguised in woman's cloths, is leading the dance (p. 74).
2. The Corpse (p. 74). Photographs by G. A. Megas.
- Pl. VIII 1. Easter buns and loaves (p. 96). Photograph by C. Hatzikonstantinou, Athens.
2. «Embroidered» Easter egg from Messenia (p. 94). Photograph by the Folklore Archives of the Academy of Athens.
3. Easter «doll» bun from Paros (p. 96). Photograph by the Folklore Archives of the Academy of Athens.
- Pl. IX 1. Flower-decked Epitaphios in the church of a hospital (p. 100). Photograph by the Πρακτορείον Ἠνωμένων Φωτορεπόρτερ, Athens.
2. The «Gardens of Adonis». Good Friday at Serres, 1954 (p. 102). Photograph by G. A. Megas.
- Pl. X 1. Easter dancing at Leonidion in the Peloponnesus (p. 111). Photograph by M. Chroussaki, Athens.
2. The dance of the «Trata» in the square at Megara (p. 111). Photograph by Phlorou Bros.
- Pl. XI 1. St. George's Day at Arachova, near Delphi. People racing to reach the lamb which is on the top of the hill (p. 114). Photograph by Megalokonomou.
2. The roasting of a lamb on a spit at Arachova, near Delphi (p. 109). Photograph by A. Oekonomides.
- Pl. XII The ceremony of the «Anastenaria» in the village of St. Helena, Serres. (21st May 1953). The Anastenarides dance barefoot on live coals, holding icons or the Gospel, while others play various instruments (p. 124). Photographs by the Πρακτορείον Ἠνωμένων Φωτορεπόρτερ, Athens.
- Pl. XIII Child leaping over a bonfire on St. John's Day (23rd June 1954) (p. 134). Photographed by the Πρακτορείον Ἠνωμένων Φωτορεπόρτερ, Athens.
- Pl. XIV The Fair of Tinos on 15th August. The miraculous icon is carried round the town in great pomp and also over

the sick (p. 149). Photograph by the Πρακτορείον 'Ηνωμένων Φωτορεπόρτερ, Athens.

- Pl. XV 1. The custom of «Fouskodendri» or funeral lamentation in the spring, at Kastanià, Stymphalia, Spring 1951 (p. 119).
2. «Leidinos», symbolic funeral. Aegina, 14th September 1953 (p. 156). Photograph by C. Cacouri.
3. «The first of the year», a symbol of abundance, Cos (p. 153).
4. The dipping of the new wreath in the water, Cos (pp. 153-4). Photographs by G. A. Megas.
- Pl. XVI 1. «Kteni» or «Psathi», the last sheaves reaped made into a large cross or comb, or woven like straw (p. 132). Photograph by the Folklore Archives of the Academy of Athens.
2. From the vintage celebrations at Markopoulo, Attica (p. 158). Photograph by the Πρακτορείον 'Ηνωμένων Φωτορεπόρτερ.
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I N T R O D U C T I O N

However fervently the Greek people—like most Christian nations—wish to conform with the teachings of the Christian faith, they still retain many beliefs which are not properly Christian: beliefs deeply rooted in the spirit of common man, beliefs inherited from remotest antiquity and often closely akin to the ways of thought of primitive man.

The Church has struggled without cease to uproot the myths and customs of ancient worship—by persuasion and enlightenment, threats and punishment. However, man has remained unchanged in this respect: he is still superstitious, credulous, full of fears concerning his earthly and future existence. Disease, failure and death threaten him at all moments, and fear dims his perception. He is constantly aware of misfortunes, present and to come, which he seeks to prevent, to avoid, to exorcize by methods which frequently owe nothing to the true faith but derive rather from magic and from ancient cults. In the place of the ancient gods he has substituted Christian saints; he has endowed them with the attributes which had once belonged to minor pagan deities. In Greece, for instance, the Prophet Elijah is the saint of rain and wind, lightning and thunder; Saint Nicholas rules over the seas and protects all seamen; Saint George is the protector of sheepfold and shepherd, and also of fighting men. Other saints are healers or guardians, and protect the faithful against various diseases and evils. Thus, according to circumstance, the faithful invoke the saint who has the power to help them in their particular predicament,

and try to propitiate him with prayers and offerings.

There exists a host of legends referring to miracles accomplished by saints: killing of dragons, miraculous cures, God-sent assistance or punishment.

But the Greek's belief in supernatural presence and intervention extends beyond the strictly divine, and includes other supernatural beings whose origin may be traced to the minor demonology of the ancient Greeks or the myth-making imagination of primitive man. Martin Nilsson, that learned and tireless investigator of ancient Greek religion, says: "Christianity easily swept away the great gods, but the minor daemons of popular belief offered a stubborn resistance. They were nearer to mother earth. The Greek peasant of to-day still believes in the nymphs, though he gives them all the old name of the sea nymphs-Neraids." The Greek has also retained his belief in ogresses and witches, in Ghello the child-killer, in the Fates, in Charon, in bucolic and marine demons, who have kept the same, or very similar, attributes to those under which they were known in ancient times. Thus the three Fates still gather round a child's cradle three days after its birth to determine its destiny, and a table covered with sweetmeats is still set by the cradle to appease them. Charon, on the other hand, has grown in stature: he is not merely the ferryman who rows the souls of the dead across the river Acheron, but the implacable demon of Death himself. But the custom of placing a coin on the corpse, to pay for his fare to Hades, is certainly a remnant of the old belief in Charon the ferryman. In Hades, the dark dank abode of the dead, good and bad, old and young are all huddled together without discrimination, without pity or comfort. Charon, the grim master of Hades, rules over them all with his queen. Martin Nilsson says that the Hades of modern Greeks is still the lifeless, comfortless, subterranean world

described by Homer, even though the Christian concept of heaven and hell is widely known in Greece. "It is extraordinary", Nilsson says, "that the Homeric kingdom of the dead should have remained so deeply engraved in the people's imagination that neither mythology nor Christianity have ever been able to uproot it."

The beliefs of the modern Greeks concerning Hades and the dead are thus a strange and heterogeneous mixture of pagan and Christian traditions. So it is with other aspects of modern Greek worship. Since the early years of Christianity nothing perhaps has been repressed by the Church with such severity and insistence as the custom of sacrificing live creatures—mainly animals—upon the altars of the ancient gods. Yet not only cocks but also bulls and rams were still being offered in sacrifice only a few decades ago by Greek peasants in Northern and Eastern Thrace, in Cappadocia and Asia Minor. The custom persisted even after the Greek disaster in Asia Minor in 1922, when these peasants had to move to new homes in Macedonia, Thessaly etc., and is also to be found in the island of Mytilene, in Epirus, and other places. The details of the ritual observed in the sacrificial ceremony often recall the rites followed by pagan worshippers.

From the first years of Christianity popular attachment to these ancient traditions proved so strong that the Church was forced to make allowances. A great many festivals and ceremonies originating from the later years of antiquity were thus incorporated into the Christian calendar and adapted to the spirit and letter of the new religion.

However, several festivals which have survived under different forms from ancient times are celebrated outside the purview of the Church; they are for the most part connected with various seasons or days of the year, as for instance the 1st of March, the 1st of May, the 24th of June,

the 1st of September, etc. There also exist many beliefs and customs in Greece to-day which make no pretence of appearing under a Christian guise, such as the Gardens of Adonis, the masquerading and traditional plays between Christmas and Epiphany, the Sacred Ploughs, several customs connected with sowing, harvesting and threshing, as well as remnants from ancient orgiastic rites, such as the 'Anastenaria', a kind of fire dance.

As we shall see, most religious customs in Greece are of a rural character. This is because Greece has always been mainly an agricultural country. However, it should be noted that most rural festivals are not limited to a single day in the year, but often recur in the same form twice or more within the same season, or even at a later season of the year; or, again, some regions prefer to celebrate a festival on a certain day, while others choose an alternative date.

The reason for this is that the Greeks have many differing notions as to when the year begins. The predominance of cattle-breeding in the mountainous areas of Greece has resulted in the dividing of the year into two main seasons: summer and winter. The summer period opens with the feast of St. George (April 23rd), when the shepherds leave their winter folds and move up with their flocks to the mountain pastures; this is why St. George is considered the patron saint of shepherds. The second main subdivision of the year, winter, opens with the feast of another warrior-saint, St. Demetrius (Oct. 26th), when the flocks are driven back to their folds down in the plains.

For the rural population of Greece, then, these feast-days are the two important 'landmarks' of the year—the days on which the six-monthly working agreements between shepherd and cattle-owner, farm-hand and farmer come into force or expire.

However, this division of the year has not remained al-

together free from cultural influences. Thus in Byzantium the secular year began on March 1st, while the religious year (especially after 313 A.D.) began on September 1st.

As a result, in the Dodecanese, August 31st is considered to this day as the 'end of the year' and September 1st as the first day of the year. This does not prevent the people of the Dodecanese from celebrating January 1st as well, because this had been the day officially fixed by the Romans as New Year's Day since the middle of the second century B.C. (152 B.C.) and later adopted throughout the Roman and Byzantine empires. This accounts for the variety of customs which the Greeks follow at the beginning, or what they consider the beginning, of a new year.

But that is not the only reason. Weather conditions vary considerably in different parts of Greece; consequently, important farming operations, such as sowing, reaping, etc., do not always begin simultaneously in all areas. Thus the customs and festivals which accompany these operations take place on different dates.

Generally speaking, the dates chosen for each festival, and the customs that go with it, have a special significance, as they help us to discover the reason which brought that festival and those customs into existence, and their deeper meaning. Therefore, we have considered it advisable to examine each festival in close relation with the time of the year in which it is celebrated.

It has been thought best to begin a study of this kind with the winter festivals, when work in the fields is suspended and the peasants spend most of their time at home, resting from the toil of spring, summer and autumn. Then the fatted pigs are killed and the barrels of wine opened, and the great festivals of the year follow each other in quick succession. Leisure, plentiful food and drink give life to the villages which take on a different aspect, gay and more prosperous.

A well-laden table and high spirits at the beginning of the year represent for the peasant the best omen, the best guarantee for an auspicious new year.

The first sign of coming winter, as we have said, is when the shepherds bring down their flocks from the mountain pastures to the pens in the plains. That is also the time when farmers begin sowing. There is no such coincidence in spring: it is only the shepherds who look upon April 23rd as being the end of winter, because only then do the mountain pastures become accessible. In the plains and valleys spring comes much earlier. It is a common belief that the swallows return from the south on March 25th (the Day of the Annunciation), nor is the proverb, "from March onward, summer; from August onward, winter", quite without foundation.

In their popular songs and ballads the Greeks distinguish four different seasons in the year, but they do not strictly follow the calendar in determining the beginning and end of each season. It is this popular, non-official conception of the year and its seasons which we shall take as our reference in the following classification of Greek festivals.

W I N T E R F E S T I V A L S

I. FROM ST. DEMETRIUS' DAY (OCT. 26) TO ST. PHILIP'S DAY (NOV. 14)

St. Demetrius' Day.

St. Demetrius is the patron saint of Salonika, where he was born and where he died a martyr in 306 A.D., in the reign of the emperor Galerius. The church of St. Demetrius in Salonika is an impressive 5th century basilica, in which the body of the saint is still preserved. This church was known of old as 'the healing place of all Christians'. In recent years the feast of St. Demetrius has taken on a national as well as a religious character, for it is also the anniversary of the liberation of Salonika from the Turks (1912). Thus St. Demetrius' Day is celebrated with special pomp and brilliance at Salonika.

Churches dedicated to St. Demetrius exist in many other towns and villages of Greece, and Demetrius is one of the most common male Christian names in this country. St. Demetrius' Day coincides with the opening and tasting of new wine. For these reasons this first great festival of the winter season is the occasion of much drinking and revelling.

But for the farmers in particular, as we have said, St. Demetrius' Day marks an important landmark in rural life and rural occupations. It marks the opening of the winter season; summer contracts and working agreements come to an end, and new ones have to be signed for the winter. This does not mean that winter actually begins at that time; cold, rain and wind appear much later in the year; they are preceded by a brief spell of fine weather, known as the 'little summer', or 'the summer of St. Demetrius' (*l'été*

de la Saint-Martin in France, 'Indian summer' in Anglo-Saxon countries). However, beginning from St. Demetrius' Day, everything announces the coming of winter, and farmers know they must begin storing and preparing for the cold months. As at the beginning of every new season, the farmers seek to propitiate weather and circumstance, and by various symbolic actions secure a good and prosperous winter. Symbolic actions of this kind are, for instance, the masquerades and plays which take place in certain rural areas of Thrace, perhaps elsewhere as well. For instance, in the village of Tzando, in Thrace, the eve of St. Demetrius' Day used to be celebrated in the following manner: the peasants made a rudimentary camel out of old wooden boards and draped it with old rags and sheepskin; then two peasants would hide within the hollow frame of the camel—one in front and one at the back—and make it walk. Other peasants grotesquely attired and crowned with vine-leaves (a symbol of fertility), escorted the camel in pomp at sunset; they made the round of all the houses in the village and wished each housewife a good and prosperous year. In return, the housewife would present them with some gift: wheat, wine, etc. This custom is known as the '*Tzamala*'. Similar masquerades and plays with propitiatory purposes take place in several other parts of Greece during the Twelve Days (from Christmas to the Epiphany), Carnival, and on May Day.

November 8th, the feast of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

Michael and Gabriel are the Archangels who carry away the souls of men. For this reason the old women of Kotyora, in Pontus, used to keep a feast in memory of the Archangel Gabriel, so that he would take their souls away painlessly at the time of death. At Aenos, in Thrace, in order

to guard themselves from an untimely death, the villagers never left their shoes outside their house on the eve of the Archangels' feast, but kept them hidden in the house, so that the Archangel Michael should not be reminded of their existence and take them away from the world of the living.

November 11th, St. Mēnas' Day.

Mēnas means the Messenger, the Revealer (Μηνᾶς, from the verb μηνῶ: to send word, to instruct, to reveal). It is therefore believed that this saint has the power to reveal where stolen or lost articles lie hidden. His name is particularly invoked by shepherds who have lost their sheep, or who wish to protect their flock against wolves. St. Mēnas' Day is an important festival for the shepherds. Shepherds' wives refrain from using scissors on this day; indeed, they wind a thread round the scissors' mouth, a symbolic action meant to keep the wolves' jaws closed. It is also intended to keep the village-gossips' mouths shut.

On St. Mēnas' Day or thereabouts the first chilly message of winter makes itself felt. There is a popular proverb which says: "I (winter) send word (μηνῶ) of my coming on St. Mēnas', and I arrive on St. Philip's."

II. FROM ST. PHILIP'S DAY TO CHRISTMAS. SHORT LENT.

When the Church appointed December 25th as the day of Christ's birth, it also decreed that the faithful should fast forty days before that date. This forty-day fast (from November 15th to December 24th) is known as Short Lent, as distinct from the longer fasting period which precedes Easter.

From early November the farmers have begun sowing

corn and pulse (beans, vetch, peas, etc.). They hasten to finish their sowing before the winter rains set in. That is why St. Philip's Day (the day before the beginning of Short Lent) is an ordinary working day, unlike other saints' days in Greece. There is also another reason: according to tradition, St. Philip was a farmer himself and spent the eve of Short Lent working in his fields. There exists a popular saying confirming this. Thus all farmers follow his example and work in the fields on his nameday, while their wives cook home-made macaroni and take it down to their husbands in the fields (a custom to be found in Aetolia).

Here are the main Short Lent festivals:

November 21st, the Presentation of the Virgin Mary in the Temple.

This day marks an important point in the period of winter sowing. By that date the good farmer must have sown at least half his land; this is especially true in Northern Greece. Thus this feast-day is commonly known as Our Lady *Mesosporitissa* (μέσος: middle, half; σπόρος, σπορά: seed, sowing). It is also called our Lady *Polysporitissa* (πολύ: many, varied), because it is the custom on this day to boil several varieties of corn in a large cauldron. This is to be the dish of the day; plates of it are sent round to relations and neighbours with good wishes for the crops. It is also customary to throw a handful of grain (wheat, maize, beans, broad beans, etc.) into the household fountain or well, saying: "As the water flows, so may riches flow." A cupful of water is then taken from the fountain and carried into the house (Aetolia). This custom also existed in ancient Greece, under the name of '*panspermia*' (πᾶν: all; σπέρνω: to sow), which is the name it still retains in some parts of Greece, while elsewhere it has the more common appellation of '*polysporia*'. The ancient Greeks used to offer an

assortment of seeds to the goddess Demeter and other gods of the Earth (as well as to the souls of the dead and their guide, Dionysos) on the third day of the Anthesteria festival, when Hades opened its gates; while at the Pyanepsia festival (in the month corresponding to October-November) they distributed broad beans. Martin Nilsson says: "Very seldom can the continuity of a cult usage be followed through the ages as this one can. These popular customs, which belong to the oldest and, as some may say, the lowest stratum of religion, are the most long-lived of all."

It is only natural that sowing time, and particularly the day of Our Lady Mesosporitissa, should be an occasion for intensive weather forecasting. On this day, it is said, the Pleiades are seen to set below the horizon, and the weather will remain unchanged for forty consecutive days (Aetolia). In Macedonia it is believed that seed sown before November 21st will sprout after a day or two, but seed sown after that date will not sprout before forty days have elapsed. The ancient Greeks also believed that when the Pleiades set below the horizon, it meant that winter had begun and, therefore, seed sown after that date would take long in germinating.

November 30th, St. Andrew's Day.

St. Andrew is the patron saint of Patras, the largest town in the Peloponnese. The mistaken etymology of his name (ἀνδρεῖος: strong, bold; ἀνδρειεύω: to become strong, bold) has given rise to the belief that at this time night grows 'bold and strong', in other words longer, and in other parts that St. Andrew makes the crops grow strong and tall. Once again various cereals are boiled and taken to church to be blessed by the priest, in order to ensure a good crop. It is also the custom to make pancakes on St. Andrew's Day. Whoever fails to do this will find 'a hole in

his frying-pan'. For this reason St. Andrew has been nicknamed 'Trypotiganas' or 'Trypotiganitis' (τρύπα : hole; τηγάρι : frying-pan).

December 4th, St. Barbara's Day.

St. Barbara is believed to be the protectress of children against smallpox. It must be remembered that this disease was very widespread in Greece in older times—and not only in Greece but elsewhere as well vaccination was still unknown—if one would understand the fervour with which this saint was worshipped. The faithful used to offer her honey-cakes or *kollyva* (boiled wheat sprinkled with cinnamon and almonds) or boiled wheat broth. This broth has taken the saint's name, 'varvara', and it is prepared to this day in a manner presenting several ancient characteristics. In the village of Siyi, in Asia Minor, the traditional cake on St. Barbara's Day used to be a kind of leavened pancake, baked in the oven and then covered with honey. This pancake was placed on a table, and the table carried to a cross-road. The priest would come to the cross-road and make an invocation to Saint Barbara. After the invocation the housewife would distribute the pancake among the bystanders, and finally dip her fingers in the honey and make the sign of the cross with it on her front door. As regards the preparation of the *kollyva* at Baindir, in Asia Minor, which likewise took place on the eve of the saint's Day, each of the women living in the vicinity of every cross-road took along some ingredient necessary for the making of the 'varvara', i.e., the festive mixture. One supplied the wheat, which was ground in the open air at the cross-roads, another supplied the sugar, raisins, almonds, walnuts, spices, all of which was boiled out in the open. In the morning a priest was called to bless it, and then it was shared round the houses with 'retselokoupes' (cups of syrup).

It would be hard to find some explanation of the origin of these honey-cakes and their exposure at the cross-roads, were we not helped by our knowledge of the ancient Greeks' worship of the goddess Hecate, protectress of children, gates and public roads. Hecate was also known as Τριοδίτις (τρία : three; ὁδός : road), and as such she was believed to preside wherever three roads met; therefore, on the evening of the last day of each month, when the new moon rose, her ancient worshippers placed upon her altars and at the foot of her statues dishes of food known as ἑκαταῖα, the food of Hecate. This custom of exposing food offerings to St. Barbara is to be found particularly in Asia Minor, and as Hecate, too, was worshipped mainly in Asia Minor, one can easily understand how St. Barbara came to replace that deity. It is also the custom on St. Barbara's Day for the women to refrain from sweeping their houses and to hide away their brooms (Castoria).

December 6th, St. Nicholas' Day.

The three consecutive feast-days, which mark the first week of December (St. Barbara's, St. Savvas' and St. Nicholas'), take place at a time when the winter cold becomes sharper, as confirmed by the popular saying, "Here comes St. Nicholas, loaded with snow." This is the time when storms and tempests begin to happen. Perhaps it is for this reason that St. Nicholas has come to be worshipped as the patron of seamen. According to popular tradition, his clothes are always drenched with brine, his beard drips with sea-water, and his brow is covered with perspiration due to his continual efforts to reach sinking ships in time to save them from the angry waves.

St. Nicholas is lord of the wind and the tempest. No Greek ship, no matter how small, travels without his icon on board. Seamen always take a dish of *kollyva* (boiled

wheat grain), blessed during the service of St. Nicholas, before they put out to sea. If the ship comes across a rough sea, they throw the *kollyva* into the waters, saying, "Dear St. Nicholas, cease your rush." It is believed that, as soon as St. Nicholas' *kollyva* touch the water, or better still, if his icon is plunged in as well, the wind which the skipper has in mind will instantly spring up. The belief in St. Nicholas' miraculous powers have made his name immensely popular throughout Greece. Countless churches have been dedicated to him, especially on the islands and the mainland coast. His icons are literally covered with silver ex-votos representing ships. When a ship or a caique is in danger of perishing at sea, the skipper promises to bring St. Nicholas a silver or gold ex-voto, representing his ship, if he reaches land safely. The skipper and sailors carry this offering to the church barefooted. A service is held and the offering is hung on the icon of the Saint.

December 12th, St. Spyridon's Day.

St. Spyridon, bishop of Trimythous, in Cyprus, is particularly worshipped in the island of Corfu, where his mummified body is kept. On his feast-day his body is carried through the streets of Corfu in an imposing procession, followed by all the notables, the town guilds and the municipal band.

The Corfiots believe that St. Spyridon often leaves his church at night and walks abroad, across land and sea, working miracles and helping those who have invoked his name. His slippers have to be changed from time to time for they are often found mysteriously worn out with walking. There is an old Corfiot legend in which the Saint is described as driving away the plague. Owing to his name (σπυρί: spot, pimple), it is believed that he can cure smallpox and skin diseases of all kinds.

December 18th, St. Modestos' Day.

St. Modestos is the patron of farmers, and, according to a popular saying, December 18th is 'the oxen's feast'. All the farmers join in a fund to pay for a liturgy and *kollyva*. The *kollyva* and holy water are administered to the cattle (Lemnos) mixed with their usual fodder. In the village of Drymos (Macedonia) the farmers give sanctified bread to their cattle after the service, and wish them '*chronia pollà*'—many happy returns of the day. At Telonia, in Lesbos, the holy water is taken to the fields and sprinkled over the land to drive away locusts, disease and other evils. On this day the oxen and horses are allowed to rest.

III. THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

Christmas Customs.

Christmas is not as important in Greece as it is in the West. It is chiefly a religious festival, but a number of interesting popular customs go with it. Thus on Christmas Eve, at the break of day, the village children pour out into the streets and go from house to house bringing the great news. They knock at every door and sing the Greek equivalent of carols: the '*kalanda*'.

The *kalanda* are usually sung by boys, to the rhythmical accompaniment of small metal triangles and tiny clay drums. Apart from their religious contents, the *kalanda* also include good wishes and praise for the master and mistress of the house and the other members of the family. They differ from area to area. In the capital and the larger towns the children sing an old Christmas song: "Good evening, my lords; if it is your wish—of Christ's divine birth I shall tell the tale:—Christ is born to-day in the city of Bethlehem—the heavens are gladdened and all Creation rejoices.—He

lies in the manger among the horses—the King of Heaven and Maker of all things.—A host of angels sing '*Gloria in Excelsis*'—and the shepherds' faith is worthy of heaven.—From Persia come three Kings bearing gifts—a bright star shows them the way, never failing."

Apart from this rather 'academic' piece of versification, there are also several purely popular songs on the birth of Christ. This one, for instance, from Thrace: "Christ is born—bright as the sun—as the new moon—as a tall lad.—Good Mary—lying in labour—begged her women:—'Help me, I pray—in this blessed hour—this glorious hour—and go fetch the midwife'.—Until they go and come back,—Christ is born—as the new moon—as a tall lad."

The housewife offers the children buns, chestnuts or walnuts, and they move on to the next house.

The popular song we have just quoted shows that the birth of Christ is celebrated by the people as the birth of an ordinary child, and the Virgin Mary is pictured as a normal woman in the pangs of childbirth; the Christmas table is therefore Hers, it is called 'Our Lady's table'. But this particular conception of Christmas is not sufficient to explain all the strange customs which centre around the Christmas table and hearth. Several of these are very similar to the customs of New Year's Day, because, from the middle of the 4th century, December 25th was not only appointed as the day of Christ's birth but as the first day of the year as well. Thus Christmas borrowed many of the customs of the Roman New Year, i.e. the Calends of January; these customs persisted even after the beginning of the year had been moved forward to January 1st.

The chief preparations for Christmas Eve center round the Christmas table.

After several weeks of fasting, it is easily understandable that everyone, especially the children, should grow joy-

fully impatient as the great day draws near. The time has come to slaughter the pig which the family has been patiently fattening since mid-summer. The slaughtering of the pig is a custom in itself and follows a strict, and probably very ancient, ritual.

Pork is the staple dish of the Christmas meal, although in some villages it is quite customary to eat chicken the first day and kill the pig the day after.

On Christmas Eve every housewife unfailingly bakes a *christopsomo*—literally, Christ-bread. It is made in large sweet loaves of various shapes, with ornaments engraved on the crust, usually representing some aspect of the family's life and profession. For instance, at Drymos in Macedonia, a farmer's Christmas loaf is usually decorated with a plough and oxen, a wine-barrel and a house. A shepherd's Christmas loaf is often decorated with lambs, kids, a sheepfold. Special buns are baked for the cattle and the hens. They are given various shapes; for instance, in the Kozani area, the bun dedicated to the land and the sheep has the shape of a harness; it is kept in the house all the year round, nailed to the wall. The buns dedicated to the cattle are usually reduced to crumbs, salted and given to the beasts as a protection against illness.

The Christmas table is ceremoniously laid on the eve of the great day. The housewife first lays out the Christmas loaf and a pot of honey; around these she scatters various dried fruit: walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds, etc. The master of the house then makes the sign of the cross over the loaf with his knife; he wishes everyone '*chronia pollà*', cuts the loaf and gives everybody a slice. The family begin their Christmas meal with honey, after which they lift the table three times with their hands. Several other dishes follow; these vary from place to place.

An interesting Christmas custom is to be found in a

remote corner of Asia Minor, at Sinope in Pontus. On Christmas Eve the Greeks of Sinope stick a sprig of olive in the centre of the Christmas loaf; on this sprig they hang dried figs, apples and oranges. The family take their places round the table and lift it three times, saying: "Christ is born, joy has come to the world—Our Lady's table, Mary's table." Then they sit down and eat. After the meal the Christmas loaf is usually placed upon a shelf, or hung in front of the household icons, olive branch and all. There it will remain during the whole twelve day period till the Epiphany, when it will be taken down and eaten. Walnuts and honey are another important feature of the Christmas meal. In the village of Simitli near Raideostos (Rodosto) in Thrace, the housewife must prepare nine different dishes on Christmas Eve; she places them on a low table, swings burning incense over them and leaves them in front of the household icons, so that Mary Mother of Christ may eat and be content.

It is impossible not to think of the poor on Christmas day. Thus at Koroni, in Messinia, the first slice from the Christmas loaf is given to the first beggar that happens to pass by the house. The bits and crumbs left over from the Christmas dinner are also considered sacred; they are not thrown away, but dedicated to vegetation. For instance, at Koroni, the bits are put into a small bag and taken down to the fields and orchards; a handful is thrown at the root of every tree. "Even if the tree has been persistently barren, it will bear fruit next season without fail", the inhabitants say.

Pouring oil or wine over the hearth is also a common custom. It is a survival from the libations of the ancient Greeks to the hearth, symbolized by the goddess Hestia. Thus in Trebizond and Sourmenà, (Pontus), on Christmas night the master of the house used to pour wine crosswise

over the hearth; in the island of Leucas and in Parga (Epirus) the pouring of wine was followed by the pouring out of oil.

In the rural areas many practices tending to secure a good crop for the farmer are connected with the hearth. Thus the ploughshare and the Christmas table are both placed close to the hearth. In Drymos, a village in Macedonia, the Christmas cake is placed at the centre of the table and covered with a plate filled with wheat grain, garlic, silver coins, pomegranates, dried fruit, grapes, watermelon and a glass of wine in which the housewife dips the '*Kallikantzaros*' buns (of them we shall speak later). The family and guests drink the wine first, wishing each other 'a good year'. The purpose of these practices is to protect the cattle from all evil and ensure good crops and prosperity for the household. The ploughshare is placed close to the fire on the hearth, and the smoking embers used instead of incense to bless the Christmas cake. The manservant then carries the censer to the stable and sheepfold, and swings it over the cattle and the farming tools. This is done three times a year: at Christmas, on New Year's Day and at Epiphany.

On such a solemn occasion, when the whole family is gathered round the Christmas table, it is natural that the dead should be remembered. This explains the offerings to the dead and the visits to the cemetery at Christmas time. No matter how many dishes are prepared for the Christmas meal—and they are numerous indeed, usually nine different kinds in Thrace—two of them cannot be missing from the Christmas table: white beans and *kollyva* broth. One is supposed to take three spoonfuls of each.

The cult of the dead takes many different forms at Christmas time. Thus in the island of Nisyros, in the Dodecanese, the priest holds a brief service on Christmas night, after which he distributes the sanctified victuals to the faithful. On returning home, these victuals are the first dishes to be

placed on the Christmas table, and the first to be eaten. At Lasithi, in Crete, the housewife on Christmas day fries some liver, which she takes to church with a bottle of wine and a bun, to be blessed and distributed among the faithful after the liturgy.

There exist several other customs confirming the significance which the birth of Christ has assumed in the popular fancy. Some village-women stay up all night in order to see the heavens bursting open in glory; they believe that any wish made at this time will come true. At Kios, in the Propontis (Sea of Marmora), on Christmas Eve, the village girls used to gather at a friend's house. There they would open the windowshutters and place a sprig of dried basil in a basin of water, and next to it the icon of the Virgin Mary. They censured the basin and the whole room, read and sang Christmas hymns, and glanced at intervals through the window in the direction of the East. At the moment of Christ's birth, if they were good Christians, it was believed they would see a great flash like lightning on the horizon. Some girls have had visions of the Virgin Mary herself, holding Jesus in her arms. This is also a good time for weather forecasting. In Thrace it is believed that, if there is much snow at the time of Christ's birth, the summer crops will be abundant.

In order to ensure health, wealth and happiness for the household, the village people go down to the beach on Christmas Day at dawn; they gather pebbles and sand, and sprinkle their houses and workshops. In Pontus, which has preserved many Byzantine customs, hazelnuts are slightly split, and the leaves of an olive branch are passed through the cleft; then the olive branch is hung over the gate or beneath the family icons. This is a custom which Byzantium inherited from Rome.

Water drawn from the fountain at dawn on Christmas

Day is believed to possess magical powers. The yeast which will be used in the making of bread during the entire coming year is kneaded with this water. In Epirus the village girls mix flour with this special water, then light a candle and stick it on the edge of their kneading-trough, repeating three times: "Christ is born, the Light is rising—so that my yeast may be good." By morning the yeast is ready; it will be used all the year round, until next Christmas. These customs all go to show the people's faith in the miraculous powers of Christmas.

On Christmas, as on all important feast-days, the village people attempt to draw omens concerning the future. One of the most common methods of reading the future on such occasions is pyromancy. A handful of wheat grain (or green leaves from an olive- or walnut-tree) are thrown upon the hot tiles of the hearth; the way in which the grains or the leaves burst in contact with the heat indicates whether the person concerned is destined to live, or to leave his village. These grains (or leaves) are then thrown into the village fountain or well (Western Macedonia).

The Kallikantzaroi.

During the twelve-day period from Christmas to the Epiphany (December 24th-January 6th), when it is believed that the 'waters are unchristened, unhallowed', the *Kallikantzaroi* make their appearance upon earth.

Who are the *Kallikantzaroi*? They are a species of goblins, or spirits, who appear only once a year, at Christmas time. They are believed to emerge from the bowels of the earth. All the year round, equipped with axes, they strive to cut away the tree which supports the earth; but by the time they have nearly done, Christ is born, the tree grows anew, and the spirits leap to the surface of the earth in a rage.

Popular imagination has given the Kallikantzaroi numerous and varied shapes. According to some people, "they are like human beings, only dark and ugly, very tall, and they wear iron clogs." Others believe them to be "very swarthy, with red eyes, cleft hooves, monkeys' arms, and bodies covered with hair." Others again picture them as "lame, squint-eyed creatures, very stupid..." They feed on worms, frogs, snakes, etc. They slip into people's houses through the chimney; they make water on the fire, ride astride people's backs, force them to dance, and pester them in every imaginable way.

It is believed that children born at Christmas turn into Kallikantzaroi, because they were conceived on the Day of the Annunciation (March 25th, exactly nine months to Christmas). If a child is born at Christmas, its mother must bind it in garlic tresses or straw, to prevent it from joining the Kallikantzaroi; another way of preventing this is to singe the child's toe-nails, for it cannot become a Kallikantzaros without toe-nails.

According to Nicholas Politis, the great pioneer of Greek folklore research, the Kallikantzaroi are a creation of neo-hellenic mythology, originating from the fact that the Twelve Days from Christmas to the Epiphany have always been a time of intensive masquerading, and that the masqueraders were known to frighten and pester people in the same way as the Kallikantzaroi. However, various features concerning the origin, the aspect and the activities of the Kallikantzaroi—the fact that they rise from the bowels of the earth, where they spend most of their time; that they appear in various guises, most frequently as hairy creatures, as Moors or animals; that they are very noisy, that they dance, jump, hop and rove everywhere; that they merely pester people without doing them any real harm; that they are known to pollute food—

all this allows us to surmise that there may be some relation between the Kallikantzaroi and the souls of the dead, who are commonly believed to return among the living for a short while once a year. This conception is confirmed by the beliefs of the people of Pharasa, in Cappadocia, regarding the '*mnemorati*', in other words the dead: that is to say, the belief is current among them that during the Twelve Days of Christmas the dead go round the houses at night and enter them by passing down the chimneys; consequently incense is burned in the fire to ward them off; they are imagined to be blackamoors dressed in rags, who will go away on the eighth of January.

These spirits of the Twelve Days may well be the *Kῆρες*, that is to say, the souls residing in Hades, who returned to earth, according to ancient Greek belief, during the Anthesteria festival (when Hades opened its gates) and pestered the living. They, too, befouled food; and for this reason the ancient Athenians used to surround their temples with a red thread, thus making a magic circle which the souls of the dead could not cross, smear their front doors with pitch, and chew box-thorn, in order to prevent the souls of the dead from entering their temples, their houses, their bodies.

Fear of the Kallikantzaroi gives rise to-day to very similar protective measures: the lower jaw of a pig (which is supposed to have protective powers) is hung behind the front door or inside the chimney; an alternative measure is to throw a handful of salt or an old shoe into the fireplace, for the bursting noise and the stench caused by the burnt salt or leather are believed to keep the Kallikantzaroi away. In other villages it is the custom to hang a tuft of tangled flax over the door; by the time the Kallikantzaroi have finished disentangling the flax and counting the threads, the cock crows and the sun scatters the spirits of darkness. Some people

prefer to coax them away with sweets and honey-cakes. In Cyprus, on the eve of the Epiphany, when the Kallikantzaroï are preparing to leave, the villagers try to be kind to them and scatter pancakes on the roof for the spirits to take away on their last round.

However, the principal means of keeping the Kallikantzaroï away from the home is fire, which is generally believed to be unfavourable to evil spirits. The hearth is kept burning day and night throughout the Twelve Days. On Christmas Eve the master of the house brings in a stout log hewn from a thorny tree (prickly pear or wild cherry). This is known as the Christmas log, the Twelve-Day log, or the *Skarkantzalos* (from *Kallikantzaros*). Before it is placed in the hearth, it is sprinkled with various dried fruit. The charred wood and the ashes left in the grate are both believed to have protective powers and are used to protect the house and the land from all evil: demons, bugs and hail. In some villages two or more logs are thrown into the fire instead of one, as a rule branches cut from fruit-trees. They are placed on the grate in pairs and lit together; this is called the 'coupling of fire'. Certain wild plants are known to make loud bursting noises and thick smoke when burning, both of which unfailingly drive away the Kallikantzaroï; for this reason wild asparagus, pine, thistle and other plants are often thrown into the fire as well.

In Northern Greece, in Pontus and elsewhere large bonfires are lit on the village squares on Christmas Eve. During Short Lent the village children have been busily collecting dry twigs and bramble from the surrounding hills. With these twigs (or cedar-wood) they build up a tall stack in the middle of the village square; they set fire to it at dusk on Christmas Eve. The villagers gather round the bonfire, and the children sing Christmas hymns, while the villagers ring the bells of their cattle in unison. The

sound of the bells and the smoke from the fire are intended to neutralize the power of the Kallikantzaroï.

In many villages, from Christmas to Epiphany, at which time the waters will at last be blessed, people never go out into the street without a candle or torch. But the only truly effective means of dispersing the Kallikantzaroï is the blessing of the waters, at the Epiphany. Then all the evil spirits scuttle away in a hurry, pursued by the priest's sprinkler (a cluster of sweet basil dipped in holy water). As they leave the world of the living, they whisper to each other: "Let us go, let us go — for here comes the blasted priest — with his sprinkler and holy water."

New Year's Day.

Although, as has been said, in the minds of the people the first of March and first of September are, by ancient tradition, often considered to be the beginning of the year, the first of January is generally considered as the first day of the year in the proper sense of the word. It further acquires special significance from the fact that, on this day, reverence is done to the memory of one of the greatest fathers of the Greek Orthodox Church, St. Basil.

The personality of St. Basil gives life and sparkle to the feast; he becomes the bearer, and donor, of wishes and blessings which anyone standing at the opening of a fresh period of the year expects and hopes for from the Giver of all wealth: the Lord God.

On New Year's Eve, as on Christmas Eve, not only children but grown-ups also go from house to house singing the *kalanda*. In their hands they carry an apple, an orange, a paper ship, or a paper star, but most commonly a green rod cut from a cornel-tree or some other hard trunk. With this rod they tap the master of the house and his family on the back, while they sing their good wishes.

This is also done on New Year's Day, in combination with various symbolic actions aiming at securing happiness and prosperity for the household during the coming year; for instance, poking the fire, or sprinkling wheat or barley grain in the back-yard, and so on. The housewife always gives the children something: buns, cakes, nuts, or coins. In Pontus and in Cappadocia the coins used to be stuck into an orange or an apple, as was the custom in Byzantium. This custom naturally varies from place to place. Thus, in the vicinity of Adrianople, in Thrace, on the morning of New Year's Day, children aged from 12 to 16 used to go from house to house holding a straight green branch with which they tapped the family on the back, saying: "A strong body, a strong cross, like silver, like cornel—and may next year find you all strong and of good heart." At Kosti, in Thrace, the cornel-branch used to be wrapped in the silver belt once worn by the children's mother, which accounts for the verse 'like silver, like cornel'. At Sinope, in Pontus, when the New Year dawned, the village girls used to visit their kinsfolk's houses holding a wild-laurel branch. They would throw the laurel into the fire, saying: "Many happy returns of the day and may you prosper." The family gave each girl an orange with a small silver coin stuck in it, and other fruit and sweets. In the island of Lemnos the village children go into every house holding a basket; then they kneel, saying: "Good-day to you, this is St. Basil's Day." They are given *loukoums* (Turkish delight) made with flour, walnuts and currants, which they put in their basket. They run away clucking like hens: '*luk-luk-luk*', causing an uproar in the streets. They are always welcomed by the village women and greeted thus: "Sit down, that our hen too may sit and lay eggs."

An important point in the New Year ritual is the choice of the person to be the first to enter the house on New Year's Day.

In some parts of Greece it is believed that the first person to enter the house should be the master of the house himself or his eldest son, or a 'lucky child' (a lucky child usually means a child whose parents are both alive). The person chosen enters the house following a certain ritual, and his entrance is accompanied by a great deal of well-wishing. Thus, in the island of Amorgos, the chosen person must be a member of the family, and he must be on his way back from church and hold a small icon in his hand. He takes two steps into the house, saying: "Come in, good luck!" Then he takes two steps backwards and says: "Out, ill luck!" This must be done three times. The third time he steps into the house, he throws a pomegranate to the ground with great force, so that it will split open. Then all the members of the family dip a finger in honey and suck it, so that the coming year may be as sweet as honey. This is followed by eating boiled wheat "in St. Basil's name". At Aposkepo, near Castoria, a lucky child is called into the house and asked to poke the fire with a stout knotty stick, while he says: "Male children, female lambs." At Lasithi, in Crete, the first stranger to enter the house must bring in a large stone, place it in the middle of the room, sit upon it and say: "Good-day to you, happy new month, blessings upon your poultry, your lambs and your goats. May your hen sit on her eggs, may your cow give birth to a calf, may your she-ass give birth to a mule. Female lambs and kids to you, and male children. And may gold the weight of this stone enter your house." The stranger is then offered sweetmeats.

In the island of Carpathos, on the morning of New Year's Day, a white dog is brought into the house and fed with '*baklavà*', a sweetmeat made with honey and almonds. This is believed to give the household strength of body and spirit.

In Northern Greece, on New Year's Day as on Christ-

mas Day, large bonfires are lit on the village square; children and grown-ups dance round and round the fire, singing the *kalanda*.

Branches of holm-oak are placed on the hearth, where the Christmas log has been burning since Christmas Day, while the following song is sung: "Good-day and hail St. Basil—holding a branch of holm-oak—bringing profit to the house—count the leaves and the twigs—so many coins, so many years will you live." (Epirus).

Then a member of the family pokes the fire and draws omens from the shape of the laurel or olive leaves thrown upon the hot tiles of the hearth.

The dinner-table is another important feature of the New Year festivities. It must be richly laden, for abundance of food on New Year's Day warrants an abundance of goods all the year round. Apart from cold and hot dishes, the table is also laden with fruit, fresh or dried, honey, olive-branches and other symbols of happiness and prosperity. For instance, the inhabitants of Lemnos place pomegranates on the New Year's Day table, these symbolizing abundance and also sweetmeats; honey is essential. The table remains thus decorated all day. At Madytos it used to be the custom to place on the table an olive-branch for health, coins for happiness, etc.

But the main dish to adorn the New Year's Day table is the *Vassilopitta* (St. Basil's cake; in French, *gâteau des rois*). The cutting of the *Vassilopitta* will reveal what the New Year holds in store for the family, and he who gets the silver or gold coin hidden in the cake will be the lucky person of the year.

This custom is also observed in Athens and the larger towns although there the *Vassilopitta* is not baked at home but bought at a confectioner's. It is made of milk, eggs, butter and sugar; its shape is round, and the new year

is embossed on its crust with dough. The coin is slipped into it after it has been baked. In the villages and provincial towns the *Vassilopitta* is made differently: more spices go into it, and it is more elaborately decorated. The decorations are made with dough, and they usually represent a sheepfold, a shepherd's hut, etc., with a cross made of currants and hazel-nuts "in order that the sheep and goats may get pregnant." (Vogatsikò⁸). Apart from the coin, other objects are sometimes inserted in the cake; for instance, at Skopos, in Thrace, it is the custom to put in a small curly sprig of cornel and a piece of straw as well. The person who gets the cornel leaf will inherit the vineyard and become a labourer, and the one who gets the straw will become a farmer.

The *Vassilopitta* is cut by the master of the house with much solemnity. First he cuts a slice for St. Basil, then a slice for the house, then one for each member of the household, following a strict hierarchy. There is also a slice for the cattle. Last he cuts a large slice for the poor. At Methone, in Messinia, after the cake has been cut, all the slices are put in a napkin and then drawn out one at a time. The first slice to be drawn is for the house, the second for the caique or the boat, should the family possess one, the third for the poor, and the fourth for the master of the house. At Aghiassos, in Lesbos, the *Vassilopitta* is cut on New Year's Eve, and the master of the house with the traditional wishes hands the slices round; he also cuts a slice for Jesus Christ, another for the Virgin Mary, and separate slices for his mule, his goat, and so on. He goes down to the stables himself to give his beasts their piece of cake.

In some parts of Greece the housewife bakes a special cake for the oxen, both on Christmas Eve and on New Year's Eve. In the island of Carpathos this cake is called 'βουόπιττα' (βούς: ox; πίττα: cake, pie), and in Skyros

‘βοδόκλωρα’, and it is given the shape of a harness. This cake or pie is broken up in crumbs and mixed with salt, and then fed to the oxen.

There is a popular belief that saints come down to earth on their feast-day. Thus St. Basil (one of the four Fathers of the Church, whose feast is on January 1st) visits every house on New Year’s Day and expects to be offered something. Each household busily makes ready for his visit. At Aghiassos, in Lesbos, the table remains laid out all night, so that St. Basil may sit and eat when he chooses. A long log is placed upright in the grate, to enable St. Basil to step down the chimney without difficulty. The inhabitants of Kydoniae (Aivali,) in Asia Minor, just before going to bed on New Year’s Eve, fill a tray with various dishes : jellied pork pie, fish, cheese, sweets, a slice of Vassilopitta and a glass of water, so that St. Basil may come down and help himself. The inhabitants of the island of Skyros fill a tray with a bowl of water, two dishes of pancakes or some other sweet, a pomegranate and a pestle or a stone, so that St. Basil may refresh himself and sweeten his tongue, and so that the house may remain ‘fresh and sweet’ all year long. For the rural population St. Basil is not a man of letters (as the legend would have him) “coming from Caesarea with pen and paper”, but a farmer. One version of a very popular ballad, as sung by the rural populations of Cappadocia, Kydoniae, Crete and the Aegean islands, represents St. Basil as a ploughman. In this ballad he ploughs and sows and leads his oxen, and it is him whom Christ greets first when he appears on New Year’s Day to bless the world. Then, between Christ and the Saint begins a dialogue showing how blessed the farmer’s profession is in the eyes of God. So hallowed is the farmer’s toil that from the seed he has sown are the little birds fed, yet enough remains for the farmer to reap a rich harvest. And again God makes his presence manifest by planting a

beautiful tree wherever Christ has halted during his long journeys. From this miraculous tree a partridge flutters down and bathes in the limpid waters springing from its roots; then with her wings she sprinkles and refreshes the good farmer, who is the object of the song’s praise.

Being a farmer, St. Basil takes a lively interest in the beasts which toil in the fields. Greek farmers believe that the Saint visits the beasts on New Year’s Eve. For this reason, before nightfall, they tend the animals, brush them, wash them, and make them look their best. Then comes St. Basil to ask them if they fare well, and if they are looked after properly. Each beast gets its share of Vassilopitta, and on New Year’s Day their fodder is mixed with wheat instead of oats.

It is understandable that a slice of Vassilopitta should be put aside for St. Basil, since he is believed to visit every house to help himself; but how is one to interpret the cutting of a slice of cake for the house itself, or for the windmill, or the fishing-boat? We may find this custom easier to understand if we recall several other kinds of offerings made on New Year’s Eve or New Year’s Day in various parts of Greece. For instance, in the old days, the millers of Skyros used to throw a handful of currants, figs and walnuts into the hole of the mill, as an offering to the spirit which was believed to inhabit the mill-stream. In a similar fashion the island boatmen and fishermen throw water, sweets, pomegranates, and even a handful of coins, into their boats as an offering. In the island of Chios, very early on New Year’s Day, the master of the house used to walk round his house with a jug containing fruit, sweets and bread; then he entered the house and scattered the contents of the jug across the rooms, uttering wishes for the prosperity of the household. This too is a symbolic offering to the spirit of the house, a benevolent *daemon* which, according to popu-

lar belief, inhabits and protects every house. This spirit usually appears in the guise of a snake—no doubt a survival of the household snake-god of the ancient Greeks. "The cult of the house-snake also survives in modern Greece," says M. Nilsson. We must also regard as offerings the corn which is laid out on the New Year's Day table for the souls of the dead, who are believed to hover over the places where they spend their lives during the whole twelve-day period from Christmas to Epiphany—although in this case those who offer it are not conscious of the significance of their offering; for this reason these dishes of corn have been wrongly named 'St. Basil's *kollyva*' and used as a protective measure against superstitious fears and magic spells. In Cyprus the inhabitants boil some of their choice wheat and and mix it with currants, almonds, pomegranate, and cinnamon sugar; they arrange this mixture on a tray, put the Vassilopitta (with a lighted candle in the middle) on the top of the tray, and place it in front of the family icons.

The New Year customs in cattle-breeding areas, the ritual which takes place in the sheepfold, when the shepherds and sheep-owners welcome the New Year and cut the Vassilopitta among their flocks, are also very striking. Thus at Hassia, in Western Macedonia, the wives of shepherds and cattle-breeders get up some time before midnight on New Year's Eve to bake the Vassilopitta, in which they insert a small twig symbolizing the sheepfold. When the cake is ready—round about midnight—the master of the house takes it down to the fold; he also fetches some wine, food and bread, and with these he wishes his shepherd a happy New Year and "may the sheep increase to a thousand." Then they both sit down and drink, eat, and sing. The one who gets the piece of cake containing the curly twig will be the bearer of the sheep's good luck. The twig is then buried inside the pen, somewhere where it will not be trodden upon by man or beast.

The revelry goes on until daybreak. In the island of Skyros the farmer goes over to the fold with a bun baked especially for the oxen and with gifts for the shepherds. The beasts are led out of the pen and made to tread on some iron object; the bun is stuck on one of the oxen's horns; the ox, tossing its head up, throws the bun to the ground, and from the way it falls omens may be drawn for the coming year. The bun is then cut in two; half of it is given to the beasts, and the other half goes to the shepherd. The beasts are also given dried figs and buns made of wine-must. Finally, they are given last year's Christmas loaf, which has been hanging beneath the family icons all the year round.

In Northern Greece it is customary to masquerade between New Year's Day and Epiphany. The mummers dress up as animals (camels, bears, wolves, rams, etc.) or as conventional types (the Bride and Groom, the Old Granny, the Moor, the Skipper, etc.) The inhabitants of Thrace also masquerade at the opening of the sowing season and again in spring (Carnival and Mayday). These masquerades (that is murder and resurrection of the bridegroom, marriage, childbirth, etc.) come under those mimetic rites which are meant, by what is known as 'sympathetic magic', to rouse the fertilizing agencies of nature.

Several other magical and superstitious practices are observed in Greece for the purpose of ensuring health, good crops, or growing flocks, etc. One of the most important is the 'renewal of water'. On New Year's Day all the pitchers and jugs in the house must be replenished with new water, 'St. Basil's water'. This practice is usually accompanied by propitiatory offerings to the Nereid dwelling in the well or fountain. Thus, the women of the island of Skyros empty all their pitchers and jugs on New Year's Eve, and the morning after, as soon as the church service is over, they fetch 'new' water from the well to 'refresh' their homes. In their pockets

they carry figs, currants, must-buns, nuts, etc., with which to sweeten the water. As they throw these sweetmeats into the well or fountain, they whisper: "May all good things flow into our house, as this water flows." In Aetolia the fountain or well is 'fed' with corn; it is thrown in by a child, who must not speak a word on the way to the fountain and back; as the child does this, he says: "May riches flow as water flows." The child brings some of this 'speechless' water to the house. The entire household must drink from it and wash in it. At Madytos, in the Hellespont, the fountain is left running, while the following wish is whispered: "May good fortune flow as water flows." Then the members of the household walk away from the fountain, taking care not to look back.

It is also the custom on New Year's Day to bring a stone or sand into the house. The heaviness of the stone, the number of moss-patches on it, the number of grains in the sand, are all so many guarantees that the crops will be good during the coming year. Thus in the island of Lemnos, when visiting a neighbour or a relative on New Year's Day, one must bring a mossy stone into the house and throw it down saying: "May the purse of the master of the house grow as heavy as this stone." All stones brought into the house by visiting friends and relations are gathered into a heap and thrown away after eight days. Sometimes the stone is so large that the guest has to carry it on his back; this is considered good luck for the master of the house.

Breaking a pomegranate over the threshold is a very ancient New Year custom. On New Year's Eve the inhabitants of Arachova (near Mt. Parnassus) expose a stone and a pomegranate to the stars; next morning the person who has been to the fountain to draw the 'speechless' water throws both stone and pomegranate into the house, saying: "Strong as stone, full as pomegranate."

In some parts of Greece it is the custom to hang olive or laurel branches at the front door or gate, as was done in Byzantium. Six olive branches and six laurel branches are also hung under the family icons, while a member of the family says: "Come in, good year; go out, bad year." At Sinope, in Pontus, it was customary to hang an olive branch bearing forty or fifty leaves and studded with hazelnuts over the fireplace, where it remained all the year round. On the evening of New Year's Day the old branch was replaced by a fresh one. Byzantium inherited this custom from Rome.

There exists a rather similar custom, which consists in tapping one another on the back with an olive branch, or on the head with a wild hyacinth bulb or an iron object. In the villages near Oropos and Marathon, in Attica, the person who brings the 'speechless' water from the well also picks a few olive branches and a wild lily and touches the entire household on the head with them, wishing everybody a happy New Year. The olive branches and the lily are hung on the lintel of the front door. In Athens it is the custom to hang a wild hyacinth over the front door instead.

There exist several divinatory practices related to New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. We have already spoken of the coin inserted in the vassilopitta; another object used for divination at this time is the breast-bone of a chicken. The carcass of the chicken eaten on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day must be examined by the oldest person in the house. If the carcass is of a dark colour, it will be a happy year for the household; if it is transparent, there will be poverty in the house. The yeast used for the vassilopitta, or the first mouthful of the vassilopitta itself, or any other dish served at the New Year's Day dinner, may be used for dream-divination. For instance, in the vicinity of Patras young girls take a piece of the vassilopitta yeast, salt it heavily and bake it. They eat it just before going to bed;

the man who gives them water to drink in their dreams (the salted yeast makes them very thirsty) is destined to be their husband. Weather forecasts are also frequently made on New Year's Day. For instance, in Aetolia (Western Greece) it is believed that if the weather is fine on New Year's Day, it will remain so for another forty days. The shepherds always take note of the position in which their sheep-dogs sleep on New Year's Day.

There are many other superstitions concerning what must and what must not be done on New Year's Day. One must not cry, one must be careful not to lose anything—because one will go on doing this throughout the year. No coffee is drunk or ground on New Year's Day, for coffee is bitter. The housewife must not give away or lend anything belonging to the house. No black dog is allowed into the house; a white dog, on the contrary, is welcome—it will be given a piece of bread or cake. It is considered very bad luck to break a mirror or a glass on New Year's Day (Skyros). On this important day of the year there is a constant exchanging of gifts, good wishes and visits. In some parts of Greece the windows and doors are left open all day, so that anybody—friend or stranger—may come in and receive his share of cake.

Epiphany (January 6th).

Epiphany is also considered a great feast-day in Greece, for that is when the waters are blessed and evil spirits depart from the earth. In some villages in Western Macedonia, Epiphany is indeed the greatest festival of the entire year; the inhabitants of these villages believe that new clothes must always be worn first at Epiphany, so that they may be blessed as well.

It is also believed that any wish made at the Epiphany comes true, for on the eve of the great day the heavens

open their gates, and the wish may thus be heard. Young girls in some villages sit up all night around a pot of sweet basil, because when the heaven's burst apart at dawn the plant will be seen to flower. Another belief concerning the Epiphany is that the waters of the sea become sweet and soft and may be drunk. On the Epiphany the winds also receive baptism; the wind that happens to be blowing on that day grows mild, or will be the prevailing wind throughout the year. It is also said that in the stables the oxen suddenly break into human speech and converse together, etc.

The 'Blessing of the waters' first takes place on the eve of the Epiphany in church. This is known as the 'First Blessing'. After the service the priest goes round the village with the Cross, visiting each house in order to bless it, sprinkling all the rooms with a sprig of basil dipped in holy water. This is also done to the fountains and the fields; it is the only safe, effective way of driving away the Kallikantzaroi.

Epiphany is also an occasion for women and girls to attempt, by various means, to achieve projects of their own, usually matrimonial. In Smyrna, if a girl wished to get married within the coming year, she would plant a pot of basil in May the year before; she would tend it and water it with care until the Epiphany, at which time she broke off a small sprig from the plant, gave it to the priest during his round, and was given in return the sprig of basil with which he had blessed the waters. This precious sprig was then placed in the frame of one of the family icons, and the girl waited patiently for the husband, who could not fail to come.

The symbolism of purifying the earth and ridding it of the evil influence of the Twelve Day demons is also to be found in several other customs, such as lighting large bon-

fires, making the sign of the cross across the house with a candle from the service of the Epiphany, etc. At Anakou, in Cappadocia, on the eve of the Epiphany, the village children used to go from house to house asking for dry twigs and brambles. When they had collected a sufficient amount of firewood, they stacked it in front of the church, where the villagers gathered after the service; they set fire to the stack and burned an effigy of '*Siphotis*', the Demon. At Sinope, it was customary to 'cross the house', that is to say, stick four candles on the four outer walls of the house, to drive away the evil spirits. Farmers never fail to bless their beasts of burden with candles from the Epiphany service, and a special bun is baked for them, as at Christmas and New Year's Day.

Children sing the *kalanda* on the Eve of the Epiphany as on Christmas Eve and New Year's Day. This is what they sing as a rule: "Epiphany has come—illumination of the world—and great rejoicing in the Lord.—By Jordan river—stands our good Mary—and thus she begs St. John:— 'St. John Baptist—it is in your power—to baptize the child of God'."

In some parts of Greece it is also the custom to masquerade and go round the village wearing hideous masks and jingling bells. Both the masks and the bells are meant to frighten away the Kallikantzaroi. Sometimes the villagers dress up as Kallikantzaroi and walk round the village scaring the children.

These are the main customs attached to the 'First Blessing', on the eve of Epiphany. But the second, and most important, blessing of the waters takes place on the day of the Epiphany itself, January 6th. Then the Cross is thrown into the sea, river, or reservoir with great pomp and solemnity, the golden church banners heading the procession and the priests following in their finest robes.

In the larger towns this ceremony takes on an official character, and is attended by the State authorities, aldermen, and military and municipal bands. As soon as the priest throws the cross into the water, a number of young men dive into the water to find the cross and bring it to the surface. The one who finds it has the privilege of carrying it round the town and is loaded with gifts from all the people of the place.

The Greeks are a sea-faring people; thus it is natural that they should attach particular importance to the blessing of the waters. Not so long ago, when ships still travelled by sail, most seamen tried to be home before Christmas; they believed it was best not to be at sea during the Twelve Days. They cast anchor and waited for the waters to be blessed before they ventured upon their next journey. Even to-day, when the invention of steam enables ships to travel in all kinds of weather, Greek seamen try to be back in their home port for Epiphany. All craft lying in harbour on the day of Epiphany, from the largest passenger-ship to the smallest rowing-boat, are decked with bunting. The moment the Cross is thrown into the water, all the church-bells begin ringing, while the steamships sound their whistles and the warships fire off their guns.

According to popular belief, the natural purifying powers of sea-water become even greater after the Cross has been immersed in it. At the Epiphany, the inhabitants of the coastal areas bring their agricultural implements and family icons down to the sea to be washed.

Holy water from the Epiphany service is brought back home and drunk by all the members of the household. Holy water is also sprinkled with a sprig of olive over each room of the house, the trees in the orchard so that they may bear fruit and not be attacked by worms, the fields and vineyards to protect them from disease, the sheepfold and cattle,

and finally the wine-barrels. It is often the custom to wait until Epiphany to open the barrels of new wine.

After the great litany of the Epiphany, fruit and food are often brought to church to be blessed and distributed to the congregation in church or at home. In some villages the climax of the festivities is a banquet in which all the parishioners take part. At Nenita, in the island of Chios, each priest used to offer his parishioners bread, cheese and wine, while at Sinope, after the evening service, the village-women passed round dried figs, apples and peaches.

Epiphany is the day Christ was baptized by St. John; therefore several Epiphany customs concern godparents and godchildren. The most common custom is for the godfather to send gifts to his godchild. In certain villages of Thrace, such as Tsakili, the godfather prepares a '*photiki*' for his godchild (ῥωτίκι, from Φῶτα : Epiphany) — he ties a string to a stick; through the string he threads various sweetmeats : a dried fig, an orange, a lollipop, an apple, then again a fig, an orange, etc., until he has made a whole necklace of sweetmeats. At the end of the string he ties a small candle. The larger the '*photiki*', the taller will the child grow.

IV. FROM ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST'S DAY TO CARNIVAL

January 7th, the feast of St. John the Baptist.

The customs attached to St. John's feast are naturally connected with the baptism of Jesus Christ. Thus, in Thrace, the villagers go round the streets in groups holding bowls of water, in which they dip small boughs; with this improvised sprinkler they sprinkle each other — indeed sometimes soak each other thoroughly.

At Anchialos, in Eastern Rumelia, all the newly married men in the village used to be taken down to the seashore, to the sound of musical instruments, and thrown into the sea. It was essential that they should get wet from top to toe. Afterwards they were escorted home, where they had to kiss the hand of their parents and in-laws; the parents in turn had to wish the newly married men many happy returns of the day and sprinkled the bride with sea water. When a newly married girl was sprinkled they wished her : "Many happy returns of the day, and may you have many children."

Several other customs derive from the memory of the great honour conferred on St. John in being chosen to baptize the Lord. At Stenimachos, in Eastern Rumelia, the priest visits every house in which there is a male child; he lifts the child in his hands and says, "May he be worthy," in other words, may he become as worthy as St. John, who baptized Christ. In other parts of Greece this ceremony is performed by a group of children who go from house to house carrying a stool.

January 8th, St. Domenica's Day.

Although a minor feast, there are several very interesting customs attached to this day; they survived particularly in the villages of Eastern Rumelia, but are more common today in Macedonia, the new home of the Greek refugees from Bulgaria.

St. Dominique's is best known as the Midwife's Day. It is essentially a woman's feast, but only women who are still of age to bear children are allowed to take part in it. The honoured person on this day is not the Saint herself, but one of the most important members of the village community : the midwife.

On St. Dominique's Day all the village-women who are

still able to bear children visit the midwife and bring her gifts : articles useful to her profession (soap, towels, etc.), food and wine. Each woman pours out some water for the midwife to wash her hands, thus anticipating the day when the midwife will assist her in childbirth. Then she must kiss the '*schema*' offered to her by the old women who attend the midwife; this '*schema*' is a phallic-shaped object made from a large leek, or a sausage. The women kiss the phallus fervently and weep over it. Meanwhile the midwife, adorned with gilded flowers, onion and garlic tresses, necklaces of dried figs, currants and carob-beans, and one large onion instead of a watch, sits proudly upon a makeshift throne, watching the scene with satisfaction. The village-women surround her with great veneration—as if she were a re-incarnation of Genetyllis, the ancient Greek goddess of childbirth.

There follows a banquet, during which the womenfolk indulge in continuous and potent libations. It is not considered improper for women to get drunk on this occasion. After much eating and drinking, the midwife, still heavily bedecked, is led on a carriage through the streets of the village, as if she were a bride; she is taken to the public fountain, where she is sprinkled with water. The womenfolk escort her all the way, singing and dancing. Some of them are in fancy dress. Their songs and jokes are often extremely lewd. Needless to say, all the menfolk stay indoors on St. Dominique's Day. Woe to the man who dares go out into the street and falls into the hands of the frantic women.

January 18th, St. Athanasius' Day.

In the rural areas of Northern Greece this feast is accompanied by the sacrifice of oxen or sheep. The sacrifice is performed in public, in a very festive spirit, and is meant

to ensure health and happiness for the whole village. However, apart from the public sacrifice, each family think it necessary to kill a cock for their own happiness.

It is said to be bad luck to start work of any kind on this day. The village-women abstain from housework; they do no sewing, baking, or otherwise.

January 30th, the Three Fathers.

On January 30th, the Greeks honour the memory of three great Fathers of the Orthodox Church : Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. Their feasts are on January 1st, January 25th and January 27th respectively. These three saints are also known as 'the Doctors' and 'the Bishops'; this day has therefore been appointed a school and university feast. Special services are held in the schools; the school-children sing hymns to the Saints, recite poems or give a small performance of some kind.

The month of February begins with three feast-days in succession : St. Tryphon's, Candlemas and St. Simeon's (February 1st, 2nd and 3rd).

February 1st, St. Tryphon's Day.

St. Tryphon's Day is an agricultural festival. This saint is considered the protector of vines and fields, for he is endowed with the power to exterminate rats and caterpillars. Icons usually show him holding a pruning-knife. On this day the inhabitants of Anchialos decorate their dishes of *kollyva* with an almond-design of St. Tryphon holding a cluster of grapes. The feast begins with a religious service attended by all the vine-growers and owners of vegetable-gardens. The holy water from the service is not drunk or taken home, but used for the sprinkling of the vineyards and kitchen-

gardens. In Epirus, the vine-grower's wife bakes a large round loaf which is rolled all the way down to the vineyard or the vegetable-garden, while the family sings: "Fruitful Tryphon, come to my vineyard, come to my garden, and let us eat and drink." At Stenimachos, in Eastern Rume-lia, an 'ox is killed to please the Saint and distributed among the villagers. After the service, wrestling matches are held on the village-square; the winner is awarded a live lamb.

February 2nd, Candlemas.

The most important of the three early February feast-days is Candlemas (the Presentation of Jesus Christ at the Temple). It is also commonly called 'Μυλιαργοῦσα', Miller's Holiday (Μύλος: mill; ἀργία: holiday). The windmills remain idle at Candlemas; it is said that, even if the miller attempts to start his mill, the boards will refuse to turn (Crete). This is also a good day for weather forecasting. Whatever the weather is at Candlemas, it will remain the same for forty consecutive days, or at least till the end of February. The Cretans believe that if the weather is fine at Candlemas, there is a long winter lying ahead.

February 3rd, St. Simeon's Day.

The memory of this saint, who received Jesus at the Temple as a child, is held in particular honour by pregnant women. They abstain from work and take great precautions, for fear the child should be born 'marked' (Συμεὼν: Simeon; σημειώνω: to mark). In the island of Syra, on the eve of St. Simeon's Day, pregnant women pull their clothes over their head before going to bed (as a rule village-women simply let their clothes slip to their feet) and then pass their hands over their shoulders and hips, so that, if the child is born 'marked', at least the mark will

be on its back, where it will show least. No knives, scissors, axes or any sharp instruments should be used that day, again for fear of marking the child.

There is a popular proverb which says: "Candlemas drives away all festivals with the distaff." Early February is indeed the time when the great Christmas festivals come to an end, and holiday idleness must stop. There are only two more feast-days in the month of February: the feasts of St. Charalambos and St. Vlasios. They are both of some importance, especially in the rural areas.

February 10th, St. Charalambos' Day.

This saint is believed to protect Christians against the plague. There exist several legends in which St. Charalambos is shown driving away the plague and saving plague-stricken villages and towns. The offerings made to this saint differ from the usual gifts: as a rule, the villagers offer St. Charalambos an apron, or a little shirt made of 'one-day' cloth, i.e. cloth woven in one night by a group of women and young girls gathered together in one house. The weaving is done according to a number of magical formulae to the sound of incantations, thus endowing the shirt with, magical powers.

February 11th, St. Vlasios' Day.

This saint protects Christians against wolves, jackals and other wild beasts. No work is allowed on his feast-day. However, if one is forced or wishes to work, one must first sew a little cloth bag behind one's back. While the sewing is done, a fellow-villager must ask one the following question: "What are you sewing?" To which one must answer: "I am sewing stone and whetstone, I am sewing up the wolf's jaw." One must say this three times, and then

one can go to work with an easy mind. In Aetolia, the important point is not to load oxen, mules or horses, (women must not carry firewood either), for St. Vlasios is known as the 'cattle-strangler'—he drowns any laden animal in the river.

On St. Vlasios' Day it is the custom for the villagers to eat and drink together after the service. The dish of the day is wheat cooked in butter and honey, and mutton or goat. The sheep or goats which are to be eaten at this banquet are slaughtered in public, in front of the church, as a sacrifice to the Saint. In Corfu, it is customary to distribute water-melon to the congregation as well.

I. CARNIVAL ('APOKREOS')

As in most countries, Carnival is a time of gaiety and merriment in Greece. Before entering the long, austere Lenten period, during which the good Christian must keep a strict fast, attend no weddings, dances or fairs, and the women wear no jewelry, it is natural that one should feel the need to enjoy oneself as much as possible and indulge in every kind of extravagance.

In the old days the Carnival season opened with a firing of guns, or a beating of drums by the town-crier. In the island of Hydra, on St. Anthony's Day (January 17th), there was a general beating of drums in all the streets. At Lasta, in Gortynia, a man used to go round the streets announcing the approach of Carnival and advising those who had no fatted pigs at home to hasten to buy one.

Above all, Carnival stands for eating and drinking; and the first care of the master of the house is to procure a pig. Every household must 'bleed', that is to say, must slaughter a fatted animal, preferably a pig. In the Peloponnese, the pig's entrails, bile and heart are examined for divination purposes.

The Carnival season lasts three weeks. The first week, during which the fatted pigs are killed, is known as the 'Προφωνή' (from προφωνῶ: to address, to announce), because it was the custom in the old days for one of the villagers to announce the opening of the Carnival season from a hill or eminence near the village. The second week is known as the Meat-eating Week or Meat-Week, for

that is when the slaughtered pigs are eaten. The third week is called Cheese-eating Week or Cheese-Week; it is, in a way, an introduction and preparation for the Lenten fast: only cheese, milk and eggs are allowed at this time.

As early as St. Anthony's Day—which usually marks the beginning of the Carnival season—the womenfolk begin exchanging evening visits and gather at each other's houses. They play various parlour-games, tell riddles and puns which are often quite risky; but then a certain boldness of speech is permissible, and even indicated, during Carnival. There is also a great deal of singing and dancing. Most Carnival songs are satirical or out and out licentious. This accounts for the popular Cretan couplet: "During Carnival even old women go wild."

But the Carnival spirit begins to make itself really felt much later—on *Tsiknopefti*, the Thursday of the second week. On this day, even the poorest man will cook some meat over his fire and inhale the good smell of grilled fat. It is essentially a family meal, in which all the relatives take part, as on Meat-Saturday and Meat-Sunday. Dinner is followed by a masquerade, with dancing and singing. In Epirus, masons and their apprentices eat and drink together as one family, and all are considered equal.

Carnival Masquerades and Plays.

Masquerading during the twelve-day period from Christmas to Epiphany is a custom which is to be found only in certain parts of Greece (Pontus and the northern provinces) and which is gradually dying out. But, as masquerading during Carnival is a widely-spread custom, still very much alive in Greece, we must consider it an essential feature of Carnival festivities.

The masqueraders are designated by various names, as the 'jinglemen', the 'hooded men', the '*Koukouyeroi*', the 'Jan-

issaries', etc. However, the most common appellation is the '*Maskarades*' (from the word 'mask') or the '*Karnávaloi*' (from the word 'Carnival').

The masqueraders often dress up as a nuptial group, including the Bride and Groom, the old Match-maker (a woman), the Best Man, and *Stachtiaris*, the Ash-man, that is to say, a man wearing the national white-pleated skirt with bells around his waist and a little bag filled with ash, with which to defend the Bride and Groom. The nuptial procession ends up at the village-square, where the parody of a wedding ceremony takes place. Sometimes a few additional characters come to complete the group, such as the Doctor and the Woman Doctor, the Old Man and the Old Woman, the Gipsies, the Jew, the Vlach, the Moor, and the Devil.

Plays, parodies and satires vary greatly in subject and form, and are eagerly watched by the rest of the villagers, who usually stand in a dense circle around the self-appointed actors on the square. Another common subject for the Carnival play is the 'Court-Room': A fugitive from justice is arrested by the police and brought before the judge; he is accused of having killed...his pig. The judge listens to his defence, after which he is sentenced to death. The gallows stand waiting for him, but at the very last moment he is granted a royal pardon and saved (South-western Peloponnese).

Here are some other favourite subjects: the Funeral of the Miser, whose soul is taken away by the devils; the Gypsy Wedding (at Aghia Anna in the island of Euboea); the Robbing of the English Lords by a group of Zeibeks (Syros); the Miller's Story; the Panorama (the story of a man locked up naked in a trunk); the Factory (where men enter old and come out young), etc.

The people's love of the theatre has also led them to enact various dramatic incidents from the 17th century

Cretan epics, such as *Erotocritos*, the *Sacrifice of Abraham*, *Erophile*, and others.

In Athens, in the old days, and in a lesser degree to-day, one came across several spontaneous popular Carnival demonstrations quite apart from the official programme of festivities. Professional mummers went round the humbler quarters of Athens dressed up as women, Moors, etc., and danced round a kind of Maypole, or a cardboard horse or camel mounted by a man in a *foustanella* (the national white pleated skirt). These burlesque processions were naturally followed by a crowd of noisy children, while the onlookers threw a few coins into the tambourine passed round after the performance by one of the mummers.

In the larger towns, Carnival dances are held either at home or in public assembly-rooms. In other places, the main entertainment is simply watching the gay parade of masqueraders. The parade is usually organized by some local committee, known as the Carnival Committee.

In the villages, however, even in the midst of the pleasures of Carnival, the farmer remains deeply aware that nature is undergoing a slow change during this period. Thus, by means of various symbolic practices inherited from remote antiquity, he seeks to hasten the coming of spring and ensure the fertility of his land. The peculiar Carnival customs to be found in the rural areas of Greece are not merely due to a thirst for gaiety and enjoyment, but also to a deeper, graver tendency in man deriving from a consciousness of his dependence on nature. So it is that, in addition to the comic and satirical performances which take place on Cheese-Monday in the village-squares of Thrace, we may also find other practices inspired by a very ancient religious instinct or a primitive sense of magic.

We shall give a detailed account of such practices, as held at Vizyi in Thrace on Cheese-Monday, and as described

by the poet George Vizyinos in the 1897 issue of the "Thracian Annual", and later confirmed by the British scholar, Richard M. Dawkins, in the "Journal of Hellenic Studies", No. 26, 1906, pp. 191-206, following his visit to Thrace.

The characters in the play—for it is, in a sense, a drama—are two traditional figures known as *Kalogheroi*, an Old Granny and her prematurely born child, two girls or Brides, two gipsies and two policemen.

The protagonists are the *Kalogheroi*, who are elected every four years among the married men of the community by the village notables. The parts of the brides are played by two young bachelors, who are under the obligation not to marry during this whole four-year period. The brides wear the traditional costume of their region and paint their faces with rouge. The *Kalogheroi's* costume is far more unusual: they wear a pointed bonnet made from the hide of a wolf or fox, with the tail attached to the top. The hide of a roedeer or he-goat is then fixed to the bonnet so as to cover chest and shoulders; holes are made for the eyes and mouth; finally bells are hung round the *Kalogheroi's* waist from a leather belt. As a weapon and symbol the first *Kalogheros* holds a bow made of cornel-wood, fashioned in such a manner as to shoot ashes instead of arrows. The second *Kalogheros* holds a phallic-shaped rod.

The third female character in the play, the Old Granny, has crocus-yellow hair and a small hump on her back. She is dressed in rags and her face made to look ugly and deformed. She holds a large basket in which she has put her seven-month child (symbolized by a piece of wood). From time to time she lifts the child out, feeds it, rocks it to sleep and beats it.

On Cheese-Monday morning the *Kalogheroi*, followed by all the other characters, walk through the streets to the sound of drums and bagpipes. They go into the back-yard

of every house to see if all the farming tools are in their proper place. If they find disorder or irregularities, they have the right to take the misplaced object away; they will return it only after the master of the house has treated them to a sufficient amount of wine. They dance for a short while and are given money for the village-school and church, and wine for their own party. Then they move on to another house. On the way the 'policemen' arrest and chain all passers-by, and do not set them free unless they pay the ransom determined by the *Kalogheroi*. When the group have made the round of the whole village, they end up in the square in front of the church, where the entire village is awaiting them. It is then that the play begins.

The Gipsies are seen standing in front of a furnace or fire; they blow on it and mess about with pieces of scrap iron to make a ploughshare. The Old Granny stands a little apart with her baby. The child is the fruit of a secret marriage, and fear caused it to be born prematurely. Seated on the grass, the old woman attempts to swaddle it with the rags she has stolen from village back-yards on her furtive rounds. She complains that the baby has grown too big for her basket and that, after consuming seven oven-fuls of bread and several barrells of wine, it keeps gnawing at her brain with its constant crying. It cries not only because it has not had enough to eat and drink, but also because it wants her to find it a wife. Then the first *Kalogheros* steps forward; all this time he has been bandying jokes with the other *Kalogheros*. He begins chasing the Brides, as if he were the Old Granny's prematurely-born child, suddenly grown into a man and hungering for a wife. The Brides try to hide among the crowd, but the first *Kalogheros* pounces boldly forward and grabs one of them. This is immediately followed by the parody of a wedding ceremony. The second *Kalogheros* is best man. However, when the

ceremony is over, the second *Kalogheros* quite unaccountably turns against the bridegroom. He snatches away his only weapon—the bow—shoots a cloud of ash into his face and throws him to the ground on his back, while the bride mourns for the loss of her husband. But the murderer soon shows signs of repenting and tries to revive the bridegroom but in vain. Amid much lamenting, four men lift up the dead bridegroom and take him away. But, before they have walked a yard, the first *Kalogheros* (the groom) sits up, wide-awake, miraculously resuscitated from the kingdom of the dead.

This last part of the play, says Vizyinos, has all the character of an impressive religious act. There is no satirical intention behind it whatsoever. Meanwhile, the village clerk has placed a plough in front of the church. The two Gipsies take the plough from him and present it in pomp to the Mayor of the village as the newly-made instrument which they have been pretending to forge over the furnace. A new yoke, decorated with flowers and made every year especially for this purpose by the young men of the village, is attached to the plough, and the two *Kalogheroi*, as docile as oxen now, come forward to be harnessed to it. (Dawkins describes the scene differently: the two Brides, with the first *Kalogheros* between them, play the part of the oxen.)

Amid deep, awed silence the voice of the *Muchtar* (the headman of the village) is heard. He takes a handful of grain from his bag and scatters it across the square: "May wheat be 20 piastres the bushel!" he cries.

Then after a while: "Five piastres a bushel of rye!"

Then again: "Three piastres a bushel of barley!"

And so on until the plough and 'oxen' have made a full circle round the church-square. Meanwhile, the onlookers reverently answer each announcement with: "Amen, O God, grant that the poor may eat! Yea, O God, grant that

the poor folks be filled!" The performance ends with dancing on the square. The two *Kalogheroi* lead the dance, in double and triple circles, until late at night.

As Dawkins has remarked, every single feature in the *Kaloghcroi* ceremony recalls Dionysiac worship, but in reality its origin may be traced even further back. It belongs to the religious practices of the primitive ploughmen of Greece who sought, by means of homeopathic magic, to influence the forces of nature, to assist the power which fertilizes the land—before that power had become personified under the name of Dionysos or Phallen, or the other gods of vegetation.

Ancient Greek mythology has fashioned the life and works of Dionysos along the same lines as the drama we have just described. Dionysos (like the Granny's prematurely born child) appears first as a '*liknites*', a cradle-child, and is brought up by the nymphs, the Theiades, in the sanctuary of Apollo, according to the rules of Delphic worship. One of the most ancient features of Dionysiac mythology is the persecution and murder of the god. At Delphi, it was believed that, after having been put to death, Dionysos was laid out in the temple of Apollo; but his death was merely the necessary condition for his resurrection in spring. This undoubtedly derives from the ancient belief in the 'yearly *daemon*', in Vegetation, which is born and destroyed every year.

The *Kalogheroi* play is to be found in several other villages of Eastern and Northern Thrace, although it is not always presented in the same dramatic form as at Vizyi. In some villages it is turned into a dumb-show, which brings out its symbolic meaning more clearly. Here again, the *Kalogheros* is elected by the village notables and goes round the village escorted by a group of mummers; in the island of Skyros, as in Vizyi, he wears hides and

bells around his waist, and he holds a phallic-shaped rod. In some villages the *Kalogheros* is driven around the streets in a two-wheeled cart drawn by small boys. Their lewd quips, their appearance in general, bring to mind the *Comastae*, the members of a *Kōmos* (i.e. procession) that drove through ancient Athens during the rural Dionysiac festivals, the *Choai* and the *Linaea*.

In the old days the inhabitants of Skandali, in the island of Lemnos, used to harness a pair of dogs to a small wooden plough; a man pushed the plough and urged the dogs on, while another walked ahead scattering handfuls of ash as he went.

These parodies of sowing are sufficient proof that the custom of dramatizing the act of ploughing must have been very widespread throughout Greece in earlier years. It is a custom which may also be found in the ancient and modern history of various other nations, and indeed in countries as far apart as Britain and India.

All Soul's Day.

There is a set of customs of an entirely different



"Gheros" from Skyros.

nature from the ones we have just described, which interrupt for a short while the general merriment of the Carnival season.

It is a common belief that during the first week of Carnival the souls of the dead are set free and wander among the living. For this reason, after the fatted pig has been killed and the Carnival meal begins, the first mouthful of meat and the first draught of wine must be accompanied by the prayer : " May God forgive the souls of the dead." In some places, such as Kydoniae in Asia Minor, it was the custom on the Thursday of Meat-Week to boil some rice with meat and distribute it to the poor in memory of the dead.

However, the principal days consecrated to the dead are Meat-Week Saturday and Cheese-Week Saturday, and the first Saturday in Lent—all three called All Souls' Day (Ψυχосάββατον — ψυχή : soul, Σάββατον : Saturday). Every housewife prepares a dish of *kollyva*, or pap, or *halva* (minced almonds with flour), which she distributes to her neighbours that the souls of her dead relations may be forgiven. Every family visits the graves of its dead. On All Souls' Day a long procession of black-clad women and girls is seen moving towards the cemetery with dishes of *kollyva* decorated with powdered sugar, cinnamon, walnuts, sesame, pomegranate, parsley, currants, etc. The dishes are placed on the graves as an offering to the dead; the relatives then light candles and burn incense over the family tomb.

The holiness of this day is confirmed by the fact that women abstain from work, remain unwashed and observe several other prohibitions.

In some parts of Greece offerings to the dead are made on Cheese-Week Sunday instead of Saturday. Thus at Kipouriò, in Western Macedonia, each family comes

to church with a cake, wheat grain, wine, cheese, etc. After the service the food is taken to the cemetery and placed on the graves. It is finally passed round and eaten before the procession leaves the cemetery.

Cheese-Week.

The general gaiety of Carnival, the dancing and masquerading, the licentiousness and exuberance, reach their highest peak on the last Sunday of Carnival. The whole day is spent in masquerading, paying visits, eating and drinking. The general din is heightened by the firing of squibs and Bengal-lights. But towards sunset, when the bells ring for evensong, the noise quietens down and the faithful slowly make their way towards the church. They are about to enter the long, grey desert-land of fasting and concentration—Lent; and they want to enter it cleansed of all the sins that burden their souls. During the evening service, priest and congregation give each other mutual forgiveness. The parishioners stand in a row, according to age; the younger members walk over to their elders, kiss their hand and say : "Forgive me," to which the older members reply : "May you be forgiven."

The evening service is often followed by dancing on the church-square or the main square of the village. The dance is usually led by the priest. This is specially the case in Artotina, where the parish-priests dance first, by order of age, singing the hymn : "Christ is the Tree, and Our Lady the Root, etc."

Cheese-Sunday Customs.

In Northern Greece, and especially in Western Macedonia, it is the custom on the evening of Cheese-Sunday (the last Sunday of Carnival) to light large bonfires on the village-square or in the streets. On the morning of

Cheese Sunday the village-children of Lakkovikia, near Mount Panghaeon, gather great armfuls of bramble and stack them outside the village, usually on the highest eminence. Then they take out their slings and throw stones at the stack of firewood, saying: "Wherever the stone lands, may the fleas disappear." The fire is lit towards dusk; the children leap over it in turn until it goes out.

The children of Vogatsikò, in Western Macedonia, prop up a small thick-leaved tree in the ground and wrap dry branches and straw round its trunk so that it will make exploding noises when it is lit. At dusk the villagers sing and dance round the burning tree. When the flames begin to subside, all the single men in the village leap over the fire in turn, calling out the name of the girl they have in mind.

The evening meal forms the climax of the Cheese Sunday festivities. It is essentially a family meal in which all the relatives take part. The table is not as richly laden as on other festivals, because meat is missing from it. In some villages, for instance in the island of Carpathos, in the Dodecanese, this meal extends beyond the family and includes the whole village. The communal table is set at the Mayor's house. The traditional dishes on this occasion are macaroni, eggs, cheese-pies, milk-pies, and a special dish called *tyrozoumi* (τυρός: cheese; ζουμι: broth). It is made of stewed wild herbs mixed with white goat-cheese. Various customs accompany this last Carnival meal. In Arcadia the relatives gather at the house of the oldest member of the family. The first dish to be placed on the table is the *tyrozoumi*. The family say a short prayer, and then lift the table with their little fingers three times, saying: "Holy broth, cheese-broth — whoever drinks of it and does not laugh — shall not be

bitten by fleas." Each member of the family must drink three spoonfuls of the broth, quickly and in silence; when this is done, they all burst out laughing in unison. The next dish is macaroni. Unmarried boys and girls try to slip a piece of macaroni in their pockets unnoticed, in order to put it under their pillow before going to bed and dream of their future wife or husband. When everyone has finished eating, the eldest member of the family orders the relatives to lift the table with their little fingers, and asks them:

"Have you eaten enough?"

"We have."

"Have you drunk enough?"

"We have."

"Are you full?"

"We are full."

"May you always be full."

The last dish of the Cheese-Sunday meal is usually eggs. This accounts for the popular saying, "With an egg I close my mouth, with an egg I shall open it again," meaning the red, hard-boiled Easter egg with which the long Lenten fast comes to an end. In Eastern Rumelia the diners used to roll their eggs across the table, saying: "May Lent roll by even as this egg rolls." Then they stopped their mouths with the egg. In the old days the Cheese-Sunday meal ended with a game called '*Haskas*', played with an egg or with '*halva*'.

In the island of Skyros and other places, the last egg left over from the meal used to be hung from the ceiling by a string; the guests, sitting around the table, hit at the egg with their foreheads to make it swing round, and then try to catch it with their lips.

The evening meal on Cheese Sunday is followed by singing and dancing. The 'pepper-dance' is much favoured;

the dancers accompany their steps with various comical gestures mimicking 'the devil's monks grinding pepper'. The dancing is often interrupted by the sudden arrival of masqueraders, who feel free—under the cover of their masks—to do any mischief they can think of. Dancing alternates with other, less strenuous, games, such as the 'magician', the 'ring', the 'stork', the 'slave-girl', etc. The loud, glad sounds of the feast are often punctuated by the firing of guns; it is a neighbour's greeting, meaning: "May I find you well, neighbour." In reply comes another volley of gunshots, meaning: "Happily may you come, neighbour,"—in other words, an invitation.

There also exist several divinatory practices attached to Cheese Sunday. If an ant or other insect is seen crawling under the table after the meal is over, it is a sign of future prosperity. In Aetolia the traditional eggs are closely examined while left on the fire. If the egg-shell breaks, the person for whom it is destined will not enjoy good health; if the egg merely 'perspires', the person who gets it can count on good health. In Skyros the person who sneezes during the evening meal will not outlive the year. In order to prevent this evil fate, the sneezer's shirt is torn open from the throat to the waist.

Clean Monday.

The last Sunday of Carnival is followed by Clean Monday, the first day of Lent. For this reason it is also known as the 'First Fasting Day' or the 'First Monday'. The most common term—Clean Monday—derives not only from the housewives' custom of cleaning their pots and pans with hot water mixed with ashes, but mainly from the fact that this day marks the beginning of a spiritual and bodily purification from the sins (mainly of self-indulgence) committed during Carnival. Although Clean

Monday officially belongs to the Lenten period, it is essentially a continuation of Carnival, for it is not easy to give up all at once the pleasures enjoyed during three whole weeks. Thus Clean Monday is a holiday and a festive occasion throughout Greece. Carnival feast-days, especially the last Sunday, are all celebrated at home with family reunions, dances, evening visits. Clean Monday, however, is essentially an open-air holiday and symbolizes the first meeting with spring and the dismissal of winter.

In all the villages and towns of Greece, Clean Monday is celebrated by a general exodus to the country. Each family sets out for the fields or the woods. The grown-ups carry large hampers of food and demijohns of wine, and the children hold coloured kites—kite-flying being one of the main features of Clean Monday.

In Athens the traditional place for the Clean Monday meal is the grassy plot of ground by the ruins of the temple of Olympian Zeus. Evzones of the Royal Bodyguard, milkmen from various provinces now established in Athens, may be seen dancing to the sound of popular instruments. The countryside surrounding Athens is also much favoured by holiday-makers, while the inhabitants of the suburbs prefer to lay the Clean Monday table in their own garden or backyard.

Clean Monday has its own traditional dishes like Cheese Sunday. It must be lenten fare—the main dishes being fish-roe salad, green onions, lettuce and sea-food. These are accompanied by '*lagana*', flat oval loaves of unleavened bread that are baked only on this one day.

In the larger cities and most of the provincial towns Clean Monday festivities consist only of open-air meals and dancing on the green. But in certain districts the festivities borrow many features from Carnival customs. Groups of mummers go round the fields improvising

dumb shows and pestering everybody. In Thebes, it is the custom to parody a peasant wedding, with the bride wearing large bronze bells around her neck and the relatives riding donkeys backwards, etc. In other parts of Greece the subject chosen for the dumb show is a funeral—usually the funeral of the Cheese-Eater, or of King Carnival himself—and probably contains a deeper symbolism related to the order of the seasons.

On Clean Monday, the men, women and children of Koroni, in Messinia, all masquerade, and there is far more merriment than during Carnival itself. Various games are played, and here again there is a parody of a funeral: a man lies down pretending to be dead; the womenfolk gather around him lamenting loudly. At Lefkogeia, in Crete, the funeral of King Carnival takes place on the afternoon of Clean Monday. The villagers, all heavily painted, gather in the village-square. One of them lies down upon a wooden board, pretending to be dead. He is buried by a personage symbolizing Lent: a man dressed up as a woman, thin, tall, wearing black. The church bells toll mournfully as for a real funeral; painted children bring wreaths of flowers. The funeral bier is followed by the relatives, all in fancy dress and mourning loudly: "Come to His funeral, make the sign of the cross—until yesterday you made merry, with Him at your side, etc." After having gone round the whole village, the funeral procession halts at the church-square, where the performance comes to an end.

At Katsidoni in Crete, it is the custom to boil macaroni, cheese, meat and other Easter food in a large pan, and to carry it down to the fields where it is buried, while the peasants burn incense over it, with loud lament—"for 'Broadbean' has arrived and sent 'Macaroni' and 'Meatman' into exile."

But the moment the church bells begin to ring for evening service, all the loud merriment of Clean Monday comes to an abrupt end, and the austere period of prayer and fasting begins.

II. LENT ('MEGALI SARAKOSTI')

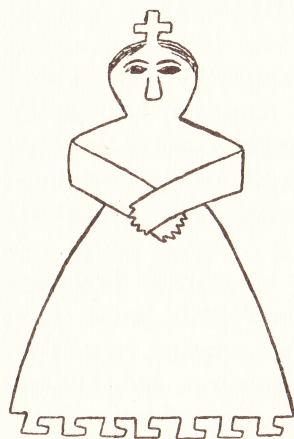
Lent is the period of fasting appointed by the Church in memory of Christ's forty-day fast. However, Lent really consists of forty-eight days—seven weeks—and is therefore called 'Great' Lent (Μεγάλη: great; Σαρακοστή: Lent), as distinct from the shorter Lenten period before Christmas which is only forty days long.

The fasting rules appointed by the Greek Orthodox Church are very strict, especially for 'Great' Lent. It is forbidden to eat any animal product; meat, eggs, fish, milk products are excluded; on Wednesdays and Fridays, and during the whole week preceding Easter (Holy Week), even wine and olive oil are ruled out.

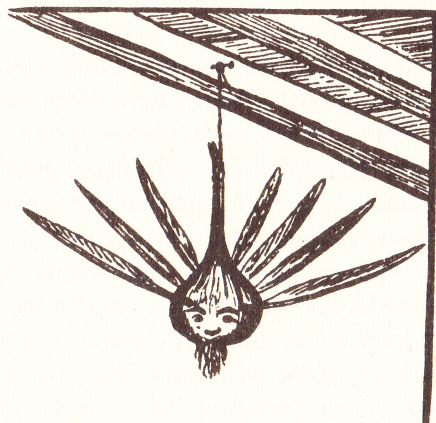
There are still many Greeks—especially in the villages—who faithfully adhere to these rules, even those concerning the first three days of Lent, the strictest of all: no water or bread are allowed. It is usually the womenfolk who keep this absolute three-day fast; they are greatly honoured by the other villagers, who show their respect by setting a table for them with special dishes: walnut-cakes, bean-soup, must-syrup, and by bringing them useful gifts: scarves, pillow-cases, etc.

It is natural that Lent should seem very slow in passing for those who fast. For this reason, in the days when there were no calendars to tell people how near they were getting to the end of the fasting period, several ingenious time-reading systems were contrived. For instance, the figure of

a nun — representing Lent — was cut out in paper; she was drawn as a woman without a mouth (abstention from food), and her hands crossed in prayer. She had seven feet (the seven weeks of fasting). This paper figure was hung on the wall, and every Saturday the fasters tore off one of



The Nun called
'Κυρά Σαρακοστή'.



The 'Kukaras',
a primitive calendar for Lent.

her seven feet. In the Pontus provinces a different method was used : seven feathers from a hen were stuck in a boiled potato or an onion hanging from the ceiling by a string. There it remained throughout Lent; the feathers were removed in turn as each week went by. It was called 'Kukaras' and was an object of great fear to the children of the house; parents used it as a threat to make them behave.

All-night prayer in church is a common practice during Lent. In the old days the faithful were awakened for the Lenten vigil by the 'Toumbakaris', a man whose duty it was to go round the streets beating a drum.

**First Saturday in Lent, the feast of
the two St. Theodores.**

One of the most popular feast-days in Lent is the day of the two St. Theodores. It is celebrated on the first Saturday in Lent and included among the numerous All Souls' Days of the Greek calendar.

As usual, the faithful offer *kollyva* to the dead and hold a commemorative service at the cemetery for all their dead ancestors and relatives. A large tray of *kollyva* is prepared separately for those who have died without offspring, or abroad, or in war, or who have been dead very many years. This tray is offered by the Church. In the larger towns this feast has an official character and is attended by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. The small flower-shops in the vicinity of the cemeteries overflow with flowers, because the mourners must bring flowers and a laurel-wreath, as well as *kollyva*, to the graves of their dead. In some parts of Greece, for instance at Koroni, in Messinia, it is the custom to make a spinach-pie or a marrow-pie on the feast of the two St. Theodores. At Panormos, in Asia Minor, the village-children used to go from house to house saying prayers for the dead, and received buns in return.

Being a day devoted to the dead, this feast is believed to have a special magical significance. The villagers on the island of Lesbos thread *kollyva* into wreaths, which they hang on the trees of their orchards to protect them against the evil eye. *Kollyva* are also the means by which unmarried girls hope to see their future husbands in their dreams; they place three or nine grains of boiled wheat in a piece of white cloth, tie it up with a black thread and put it under their pillow. The same effect can be achieved by sowing wheat according to a magic formula, by invoking the Fates, etc. For instance, at Arachova the families in which there is a John or a Theodore hang a small bag of wheat at

their front door on Friday evening. The unmarried girls who wish to see their future husbands in their dreams must visit two Theodores and one John, and try to take away a little wheat from all three houses. When they return home, they must bury the wheat in their garden. Then they must go to the well or fountain and draw some 'speechless' water; as they bring the water home through the streets, they will hear names being whispered to them. Back home, they water the buried wheat with the 'speechless' water, uttering the following incantation: "I plant you and water you — may the man who is to marry me come soon — so that we may reap you together." They also try to remember the dreams they have seen after having planted the wheat grain.

In some parts of Greece, women and girls gather in the morning to read the future; even though it is Lent, they often end up by dancing and making merry. Such is the case in the island of Skyros, where the village-girls get together on the day of the two St. Theodores to cut the traditional 'salt-pie' (made of salt and flour). The pie is baked, on the eve of the feast, with flour and salt taken from three 'lucky' houses (i.e. houses which have suffered no loss for the last few years) with a Mary or a John in the family. With this dough, the housewife also fashions the letters of the alphabet, which she spreads out on vine-twigs on the terrace, where they will remain exposed to the starlight all night long, side by side with the salt-pie. The letters of the alphabet are covered with a red cloth; each unmarried girl slips her hand under the cloth and draws out a letter: that will be the first letter of her future husband's name. Unmarried girls also put a slice of salt-pie under their pillow at night in the hope of seeing revealing dreams.

The other principal feast-days in Lent are the following:

First Sunday in Lent (Sunday of Orthodoxy).

This day has been appointed by the Church to commemorate the triumph of the True Faith against the heretics. In the early Christian centuries the priests used to read out in church an anathema against the Byzantine heretic Arius, as an example to the people.

On the first Sunday in Lent, as on January 30th (the feast of the Three Fathers), all the schools are closed; in some parts of Greece, it is an occasion for school performances and children's parties. At Aperi, in the island of Carpathos, the mothers of one-year old children bake large buns, which they take to church with other dishes of their own choice. After the priest has blessed the dishes, the congregation gathers on the village-square to eat and drink; at the end of the meal everyone wishes the children many happy returns of the day. The festivities end up with dancing and singing.

March 1st.

As we have said earlier in this survey, March is usually considered the first month of the year and the beginning of summer. It is said that "on the first of March the sky rains hot coals so that the earth may grow warm." That is how popular imagination has interpreted the change of season which occurs in the month of March. As regards the general instability of the weather in March and the damage it causes to the crops and cattle, it is attributed to the difficult, unpleasant temperament of 'Master March' — whom the Greeks have personified, like all the other months of the year. There exist several legends which attempt to explain why March laughs one day and weeps the next. According to an Athenian tradition, March has two wives; the first is very pretty and very poor, the other is ugly and rich. March sleeps between them at night. When he turns

over to his ugly wife, he grows glum and grey, and the whole world darkens. When he turns to his beautiful wife, he rejoices, and the whole world grows radiant.

Owing to the belief that fine weather first makes its appearance on March 1st, most of the customs attached to the eve of March 1st are concerned with the dismissal of winter — February in particular, usually represented as a lame man on a donkey. A procession of children escort him, banging tins and singing in chorus: "Out with you, lame February, and let March come to us with joy and flowers." Housewives sweep their houses clean, throw away all refuse and break an old earthenware jug against their front door, saying: "Bad year out — good year in — out with lame February — out with fleas and mice — in comes March and Joy and the good housewife."

Apart from insects (fleas, etc.) March also brings two other evils — one of them real but harmless, the other imaginary but harmful. Various methods are used to avert these evils. The first evil is the March sun, which burns and darkens the tender faces of children and girls. In order to counteract the effect of the sun, an object called a 'March' (i.e. twined flaxen threads, white and red, or gold and red) is tied round the wrist or the big toe, after having been exposed to the stars all night long on the boughs of a rose-bush. The red thread is thus endowed with magical powers; not only does it protect the person who wears it from the evil influence of March, but grants him many other advantages.

Thus, at Kydoniae in Asia Minor, in the island of Carpathos and other places, it was the custom to tie a thread round one's big toe to prevent one from stumbling, and another round the handle of the water-jug to keep the water cool. In Carpathos, Lesbos, etc., girls who are engaged to be married send their betrothed a 'March-thread' as a gift. If the

betrothed is abroad, his girl puts the thread in an envelope and mails it to him. This thread should be worn until Easter Sunday, at which time it is taken off and tied once again to the rose-bush from which it was first taken, so that it will become rose-coloured. In other parts of Greece the village children keep their March-threads on until the day they first see a swallow and a stork; then they take it off and place it under a stone. The stone is lifted after forty days: if ants are found crawling under it, it is a sign of happiness and wealth; if there are worms instead of ants, it is considered a bad sign.

The March-thread is believed to be a very ancient custom. St. John Chrysostom mentions it; it probably bears some connexion with the ancient custom according to which the initiates at the Eleusinian mysteries tied a thread round their left hand and foot; they ascribed to this talisman some symbolic value unknown to us (N. G. Politis).

The second object of fear during the first three days, the three middle days and the three last days of March, or the ten or twelve first days of March, are the Drimes, a species of fairies who have an evil influence on water. Anything made of cloth, if washed on one of these days, will be worn to shreds; wood hewn on one of these days will rot. Either one must avoid washing clothes and cutting wood altogether, or one must put a horse-shoe in the wash-basin, for iron is believed to be unfavourable to all demoniacal agencies. It is also not thought advisable to wash one's hair, and several other occupations in addition to wood-cutting should be avoided.

This awareness of the turn of the year and the beginning of a new, more favourable season is expressed in some parts of Greece by the custom of putting out the fire on the eve of March 1st and lighting it afresh on the following day. The same significance is attached to the custom of throwing

away the water stored in the household jugs and pitchers and taking fresh water from the fountain or well on the morning of March 1st.

There exist several other March customs of a propitiatory nature; their main purpose is to keep men and beasts in good health. Thus the womenfolk of Megara, in Attica, go down to the fields in the early morning and moisten their face and hands with the dew lying on the barley; they also cut some wheat-stalks and bring them back to their house, still moist with dew. The wheat-stalks are hung over the front door to 'keep the house cool all year long'. In the old days the housewives of Athens used to dip a handful of grass in 'speechless' water drawn from the well in the early morning; with this they sprinkled all the members of the household while still asleep; then came the turn of the rooms. While sprinkling, the housewife recited the following lines: "So you have come, March? Health has come with you, and a host of little insects. Come in, March, and bring us joy, etc."

Green grass and water symbolize health, fertility, prosperity, growth and youth. These virtues were believed to be transferred to human beings and animals if they were touched with a sprig of wild hyacinth, asphodel or any green plant. For instance, at Katsidoni, in Crete, it is the custom on March 1st to touch the oxen with an asphodel, saying: "March has come today — change your hair, put on pounds of lard and ounces of fat." In the island of Cos, not only the oxen, but the house cat as well is tapped with a green bough, to these words: "March has come, keep your tail up." It is believed this will keep the cat in good health.

The most striking custom of March 1st is the 'Procession of the Swallow', which is still to be found in the Dodecanese and elsewhere. At Metrae, in Thrace, two children fill a basket with ivy leaves; they pass a rod through the handle, and at the

end of the rod they attach the 'swallow', a wooden effigy of a bird; little bells are hung around the bird's neck. The two children go from house to house with the basket, singing: "A swallow came to us — she sat on a bough and sweetly sang: — March, good March — and ugly February, — what if you grow sour, what if you grow cross; — there will soon be a smell of summer — and even if you bring snow — it will soon be spring. — And you, good housewife, — go down to the cellar — bring up some speckled eggs — bring a little hen — bring a little bun. — Come in, Joy. — Come in, Health, — for the master, for the mistress, — for the children and the parents — and all the good relatives."

The housewife takes a few ivy leaves from the children's basket and puts them in the nest of her hen, so that she may lay many eggs. She gives the children a few eggs, and they move on to another house. Ivy is a symbol of evergreen vegetation, and it is believed to have the power to transfer fecundity and health to hens and other animals. This custom is of very ancient origin, as proved by 'The Song of the Swallow', which has reached us through Athenaeus, a Greek writer of the 3rd century A.D. There is an extraordinary similarity — not only in meaning, but also in wording — between this song and the one we have quoted above:

*See ! see ! the swallow is here !
She brings a good season, she brings a good year;
White is her breast and black is her crest;
See, the swallow is here.*

*Ho ! roll a fruit cake from your well-filled cot,
Of cheese a fair round, of wine a full pot;
Porridge she'll take and a bite of hardbake;
She never despises good cheer.*

*Go we away empty to-day?
An thou wilt give us, we'll up and away;
But an thou deny us, O here we shall stay.*

*Shall we take your door and your lintel also,
Shall we take the good wife that is sitting below?
She's not so tall, but we'll lift her and all —
We can easily bear her away.*

*If you give us but a little, then God send you more;
The swallow is here! come, open the door;
No graybeards you'll see, but children are we;
So we pray you to give us good cheer.*

(Trans. by J. M. Edmonds, «Lyra Graeca», vol. II)

It thus becomes quite clear that in ancient times children went from house to house singing the 'swallow-song' as they do to-day. The song brought the same message of spring, contained the same wishes for fecundity to beasts and plants, and the housewife was under the same obligation to bring up gifts from her cellar.

March 1st, like all days inaugurating a new season, is considered an auspicious day for forecasting weather and for divination. Thus at Adrianople, in Thrace, the women-folk used to gather at a neighbour's house on March 1st; there each woman was assigned one of the days of March. When the time came, each woman marked the weather that prevailed on her particular day in order to draw omens from it. If the weather was fine, it would remain fine throughout the year; if the sky was overcast, it was an ill omen for the family who had been assigned that particular day. In Athens, it was the custom for mothers and grandmothers to fill a shallow, white plate with oil, and make their children or grandchildren stoop over it and look at their own reflections, while they whispered various wishes.

March 9th, the feast of the Forty Martyrs.

The number 40 holds a sacred significance in the imagination of the Greek people. For this reason the forty Christian martyrs (or Forty Saints), who were put to death in 320 A. D. in the town of Sevestia while preaching the Gospel, are held in special honour in this country. All the customs attached to this day are based on the religious or magical significance of the number 40. Special dishes are prepared, such as pies covered with forty thin sheets of pastry, or forty pancakes, or a dish including forty different kinds of wild herbs, or a stew containing forty varieties of corn. These dishes are distributed among the villagers in memory of the dead. A well-known Greek motto says: "Eat forty, drink forty, and give forty to save your soul." In old Athens, after the guests had eaten the pie or the forty pancakes and drunk quantities of wine, they walked three times round the table, and then the eldest of the gathering led the dance singing: "Let us dance and let it be so, for to-day is the feast of the Forty Saints."

There exist several other customs and superstitions attached to this feast. In the old days, at Mesimvria in Eastern Rumelia, the girls had to weave or embroider a piece of cloth with forty different kinds of thread, the men had to drink forty glasses of wine and offer their fellow-villagers another forty, and everybody in the village had to say forty lies. In Laconia, if there is thunder on the feast of the Forty Saints, the snakes bury themselves forty yards in the earth; if there is no thunder, they will crawl up forty yards.

In the island of Lemnos it is the custom to plant trees, vines and flowers on the feast of the Forty Saints. The planting will not be successful on any other day but this. This is also the day when lambs should be weaned from their mothers.

At Metrae, in Thrace, the Forty Saints' is considered the most suitable day for planting sweet basil; only then will it grow green and thick — with forty shoots.

March 25th, the Day of the Annunciation.

For the Greeks this day has both a religious and a national significance. On March 25th, 1821, at the monastery of Aghia Lavra in the Peloponnese, Germanos, bishop of Patras, raised the flag of the Greek Revolution against Turkish rule. Since then March 25th has been celebrated in Greece as Independence Day.

It is essentially a spring festival. It is believed that the swallows return from the South at this date; that is why children take off the 'March-thread' they have been wearing round their wrist and let it hang on a tree for the swallows to take away, while they recite the well-known 'swallow-song.'

On March 25th shepherds in Crete lead their flocks from the sheepfold to the mountain pastures, repeating the popular motto: "Shear your sheep, ring your bells and go up to the mountains." (Siteia).

But March 25th is also celebrated as a national feast throughout Greece, from the capital to the smallest village. All public buildings, houses and shops are decked with flags. Churches and church-squares are decorated with bay and myrtle, small paper flags, pictures of the Sovereigns and the heroes of the Revolution, and coloured paper bands bearing patriotic slogans. A solemn Te Deum is sung in the principal church, with the attendance of all the local authorities, guilds and trade-unions with their banners. The school-children, headed by their teachers, march through the streets in their best clothes. All those who still possess national costumes, especially the womenfolk, school-girls and children, pull them out of the family trunk and

wear them all through the day—during the service, at the parade and at the laying of wreaths on the monument of those killed in action. The celebrations often include dancing in the main square.

March 25th always falls within the Lenten period; as meat and milk products are forbidden, the dish of the day is usually fish, mostly salted cod, fried or boiled, with garlic sauce.

April 1st.

In Greece, as in the whole of the Western world, it is the custom to tell lies and play practical jokes on April 1st. This custom is especially common among the children. The local newspapers always publish sensational false news and photographs on this day.

III. EASTER HOLIDAYS

Although Easter is a movable feast, it nearly always falls in April. We shall therefore include all Easter customs in the April festivals.

The week preceding Holy week is called Palm Week, and is commonly known as "Dumb Week," as no service is held in church throughout this period, except on Friday the eve of the Saturday of Lazarus, when a special evening service is sung. In some provinces the housewives bake special buns for the children; they knead them into the shape of a man in a winding-sheet, as Lazarus himself is traditionally represented. These buns are called '*lazaros*', and exceptional virtues are ascribed to them. In Lesbos the '*lazaros*' buns are decorated with currants, walnuts and almonds; the dough is shaped into a long thin roll and then crossed at the ends; the currants are stuck in the dough in

the shape of a cross. The children climb a small hill and roll their buns down the slope. They believe that they will find a partridge's nest near the spot where the bun rolls to a stop.

The Saturday of Lazarus.

On Saturday the village children go from house to house singing special hymns known as '*Lazarakia*', which describe the resurrection of Lazarus. They usually hold a small picture depicting the scene. In Central Greece, Macedonia and Thrace, only girls aged from 10 to 12 (sometimes a little older) are known to do this. One of the girls carries a wooden pestle (used for pounding the wash) wrapped up in brightly coloured rags. This object has the appearance of a swaddled baby. In other parts of Greece, Lazarus is represented by a distaff or a doll decorated with flowers, rags and ribbons. The Cretans make a cross of reeds and decorate it with wreaths of lemon-blossom and wild red flowers. In Cyprus, Lazarus used to be impersonated by a boy so heavily decked with yellow flowers that his face could hardly be seen. This child was led from house to house by a group of boys. As soon as the boys began to sing the Lazarus hymns, the child lay down on the ground pretending to be dead; he rose to his feet only upon hearing the group calling: "Lazarus, come out!" It is obvious that this is the most ancient and authentic version of the custom of representing Lazarus' death and resurrection. This resurrection, according to popular conception, is the "First Easter".

The time of the year in which this feast is celebrated proves that it is a survival from those ancient legends according to which a God dies in the bloom of his youth, only to rise again, acclaimed by all as a source of new life — like Adonis in the ancient Greek festivals.

Palm Sunday.

Palm Sunday has been thus named to commemorate Christ's triumphant arrival in Jerusalem shortly after the resurrection of Lazarus, when the people of the holy city strewed his path with palm branches in sign of reverence.

Wherever palm trees grow in Greece, the churches are decorated outside and inside with palm leaves; in the provinces further up north, bay and myrtle are used instead.

On Palm Sunday, palm leaves are ingeniously woven into various shapes, such as small baskets, half-moons, stars, and above all crosses. After the service, the priest stands at the church door and hands each parishioner a branch of bay or myrtle and a small palm-woven cross. This bunch is called '*vaya*', and it is afterwards stuck in the frame of one of the family icons. It is also used by mothers to bless their children and protect them against the evil eye. Protective and curative powers are generally ascribed to it.

The custom of distributing bay or myrtle on Palm Sunday was first introduced by the Church in the 9th century and, once accepted by the people, gradually took on a more poetic character. Later, it was the people themselves who supplied the church with laurel, myrtle and palm-crosses; and in time, they came to invoke the fertilizing power inhabiting the evergreen leaves of the bay tree, praying that it should be transferred to the brides of the year. This was done by touching the newly married girls with the *vaya*.

Here is a description of the custom as we found it in Epirus. At Lozetsi, all the girls who were marred within the current year gather their own *vaya* on the Saturday of Lazarus. They wear a green dress (the colour of the *vaya*) with a woollen underskirt, new embroidered slippers, red with a black tassel, and white stockings. Each bride has previously invited all her female relatives to her house to help her prepare the day's meal,

which they are to take with them to the country-rice pies, beans, olives, *halva*, wine and water. Thus equipped, they climb the nearest hill and camp on some sheltered part of the slope. Before setting out for the hill, the bride sends her sister and sister-in-law (they must be unmarried girls, with both parents living) to the woods. Their mission is to pick armfuls of bay and myrtle and bring them to the slope where the brides are waiting. Then the party begins eating and drinking, dancing and singing. The women tap the brides in turn with a cluster of *vaya*. Then the brides separate and each goes to her parish church bringing her share of *vaya*. As soon as the brides are seen to arrive, the children begin ringing the church-bells gaily. Before entering the church, each bride touches the bells with her bunch of *vaya*, those who have been married longest going first. Then they file into the church and leave their *vaya* by the altar.

The custom of touching newly married women with a bunch of *vaya* has gradually extended to all women, and even animals, trees and any living thing capable of giving birth or growing fruit. At Kardamyli, in Laconia, the womenfolk touch each other with a bunch of *vaya* at the end of the service. It is believed that a pregnant woman who has been touched with a bunch of *vaya* will have an easier confinement. In the island of Skyros, on the evening of the Saturday of Lazarus, the womenfolk weave a cross made of *vaya* and wall-flowers and take it to church next morning (Palm Sunday) to be blessed by the priest. After the Palm Sunday service, each family take their palm-cross home and greet their trees, vines, oxen, gardens, boats and windmills with it. Those who own sheep take bread, cabbage-pie and macaroni to their shepherds in a basket, with the palm-cross stuck over it. With this cross they gently tap the sheep on the back, saying: "Many happy returns of the

day — *vaya, vaya*, happy Easter — next Sunday⁴ we shall have red eggs and soft white cheese."

At Kydoniae, in Asia Minor, in Palm Week it was the custom for the verger to go round the orchards and pick a large cluster of *vaya*, which he placed in his cell. All the little girls used to tear a piece off their new frocks and hang it on the verger's *vaya*, until it was completely covered with coloured rags. On Palm Sunday, after the service, the verger put the cluster of *vaya* across his shoulder and went round the parish, escorted by a crowd of children singing: "*vaya, vaya!* On Palm Sunday — we eat fish and mackerel — and next Sunday — we shall eat red eggs." The verger used to stop at every house; he crossed the threshold and swung the cluster of *vaya* to and fro, saying: "*Rò, rò, Margarò* — money or eggs — we have searched everywhere — but we did not find the King (Christ)." The housewives rewarded him with a gift of eggs or money.

Another interesting Palm Week custom is to be found at Naimon and in other villages on Mount Aimos, in Eastern Rumelia, especially in the old days. On Palm Sunday, after the service, the village girls used to take *vaya* from the priest, and then gathered on the communal threshing-floor. There they wove the *vaya* into wreaths, using a red thread. Singing and dancing, they carried the wreaths to a brook and threw them into the water. Each girl dipped her hands in the brook and waited for the current to carry the wreaths past her. The girl whose wreath floated by first was believed to be the lucky girl of the year. On the way back to the village, the lucky girl led the dance and headed the group. It was also her duty to invite all the other girls to her house; her mother cooked for them and offered them beans, olives, etc. After dinner, the girls took each other by the hand and danced, while the older women looked on.

The decorated churches, the groups of singing children

lend Palm Sunday a particularly festive air. In their wish to include even the dead in the general rejoicing, the families who have undergone a recent bereavement visit the grave of their deceased parent and place a bunch of *vaya* (and on Holy Saturday a large candle) on it, while they convey to him or her greetings from the upper world, in the form of a popular lament: "My child, I beg you to satisfy this last wish: bring me a branch of *vaya* on Palm Sunday, and a candle at Easter."

The nature of this feast — symbolizing the triumph of Jesus over the Pharisees — allows for a certain slackening in the austerity of the Lenten fast. On this day, as on March 25th (Annunciation Day), the traditional dish is fish, salted or fresh.

Monday and Tuesday in Holy Week.

This is a week of general mourning. Singing, music, plays, entertainment in any form are forbidden. In some parts of Greece, as in the islands of Paros and Cephalonia, the church-bells remain silent throughout Holy Week — in the language of the people the bells are 'widowed' — and the faithful are called to mass by the town crier instead. On Maundy Thursday all work is suspended until after Easter. The housewives take their handlooms to pieces — for "Christ is on the Cross". Only one kind of activity is permitted: house-cleaning, whitewashing, sweeping and, in general, preparing for Easter. The faithful attend all church services regularly and are exclusively taken up with religious duties.

Holy Week calls for still more austere fasting than during the previous weeks. In some places, as in Castoria, on the first three days of Holy Week no nourishment is taken whatsoever, except for a little water in the evening; this rule is kept especially by the womenfolk, who always accept religious discipline more readily than the men. There are

two services daily during Holy Week: the morning service is sung on the evening of the preceding day, and the evening service on the following morning. Thus it may be said that Holy Week actually begins on the evening of Palm Sunday, when the churchbells call the faithful to the morning service of Holy Monday. This inaugural service is held with special pomp. The icon of Christ is carried before the *iconostasis*, while the cantors intone the hymn: "Behold the Bridegroom cometh in the middle of the night." All the evening services held from Palm Sunday to Maundy Thursday have thus been named *Nymphioi* (Bridegrooms). On the evening of Tuesday in Holy Week the service is chiefly devoted to the reading of a passage in the Gospel referring to Mary Magdalene, who poured myrrh over the feet of Christ. Most of the hymns sung during this service likewise refer to Mary Magdalene. For this reason, in the larger towns of Greece, prostitutes believe it to be their duty to go to church on Holy Tuesday and attend this particular service.

Wednesday in Holy Week.

Wednesday is devoted chiefly to the anointment of the faithful. The anointing takes place after the service. The priest anoints each parishioner with oil on the forehead, chin, cheeks and hands. Those who are unable to go to church owing to sickness or age are anointed by their own relatives at home. It is also the custom to enclose in an envelope a small wad of cotton-wool dipped in holy oil and mail it to fathers, husbands and sons who are at sea or settled in distant countries where there are no Orthodox churches.

In addition to the anointment service held in church, many people choose to have a special anointment service in their houses as well. In some places, as in the districts of Pontus, all objects which have been smeared with holy

oil are believed to acquire a mystic power. At Kotyora the priest used to go round the village on Wednesday in Holy Week holding private anointment ceremonies in every house. The family always had a tray of raw eggs, flour and salt ready for him. These were anointed by the priest and taken to church on Maundy Thursday with a number of red Easter eggs in small baskets covered with a piece of cloth.

At Koroni the three origan sticks used by the priest for the anointment are stuck in the frame of one of the family icons; if the family build a new house, these sticks are placed upon the corner-stone. On Wednesday, in Holy Week, it is also the custom to burn oil and wine in a cup until there is not a drop left; this cup must then be washed in the sea.

Maundy Thursday.

Easter preparations usually begin on the morning of Maundy Thursday. That is when the Easter eggs are dyed; the traditional colour is red, and for this reason Maundy Thursday is often called Red Thursday. It is impossible to conceive Easter in Greece without red eggs. The eggs are dyed following a strictly determined ritual. In many parts of Greece the number of Easter eggs to be dyed, and the methods of dyeing them, are restricted; for instance, they must be dyed with a special variety of red-wood, not with any other kind of colouring. The bowl which will contain the eggs must be new. The dye must not be thrown away or taken out of the house after use. In some villages it is the custom to draw various designs on the eggs, either before dyeing them, with melted wax, or after they have been dyed, with a needle. These eggs are called 'embroidered' eggs or 'partridge' eggs.

Not all the Easter eggs are equal in importance. Miraculous qualities are ascribed mainly to the first egg thrown

into the dye: it is the 'egg of the Virgin Mary', and it is used for keeping the children safe from the evil eye and for other protective purposes. Special virtues are also ascribed to the 'Evangelized eggs'—those which have been sent to church on Maundy Thursday and blessed by the priest. At Sinope, in the Pontus area, it is customary to dye as many eggs as there are people in the house, with an additional egg for the Virgin Mary. In the evening the eggs are placed in a small box and taken to church to be blessed. The box is then placed under the altar or behind the Bishop's throne, where it will remain until the Resurrection. In the old days the shells of these eggs were afterwards placed at the root of fruit-trees, with the prayer: "May all the trees bear fruit." Coincidence always seems particularly significant to the people; for this reason all eggs laid on Maundy Thursday—especially if laid by a black hen or a hen laying eggs for the first time—are endowed with miraculous qualities.

It is very probable that the colour, red in general, is believed to have a protective power. This might explain another Easter custom which consists in hanging pieces of red cloth out of the window. Thus on Maundy Thursday the inhabitants of Mesimvria, in Northern Thrace, used to dip a cloth in the dye with the eggs and hang it out of the window for forty days. This cloth was then used for many magical purposes—exorcism, etc. The housewives of Kios, in Asia Minor, used to rise at dawn on the morning of Maundy Thursday and hang a red cloth from a window looking to the east, so that the cloth would catch the first rays of the sun. At Castoria, the womenfolk hang red blankets and red kerchiefs out of their windows. The significance of this custom varies from place to place.

Apart from the dyeing of eggs, Maundy Thursday is also the day when the Easter buns must be baked. They

are usually made with fresh yeast left over from Wednesday in Holy Week. A variety of spices are thrown into the mixture; before the bun is put into the oven, it is studded with red eggs, dried fruit and designs made with bits of dough. The names for these buns vary according to their shape. They are called 'dolls', 'baskets', 'bows', 'eggs', etc. At Koroni, in Messinia, Easter buns are made with flour, olive oil, almonds, aniseed, and water in which a few bay leaves have boiled. The buns destined to the children are kneaded into the shape of a doll, complete with legs, arms and head. Each housewife bakes a large bun for the house, and smaller, doll-shaped ones for her children, nephews, nieces and godchildren. Newly married girls must bake a special bun for their mothers-in-law.

However, in spite of these festive preparations, Maundy Thursday remains a sacred and austere occasion held in special honour by the Greek people. An official service is held in all the churches on the morning of Maundy Thursday; the priests read the Gospel passage referring to the Last Supper. Even children partake of the Holy Communion on Maundy Thursday, in order to be able to participate in the Lord's Supper. In the evening, the divine service is devoted to the Passion; it is commonly known as the liturgy of the Twelve Gospels, for the priest reads twelve different Gospel passages describing the Passion of Jesus Christ. The priests wear black robes with silver crosses, and the churches are decorated in black, purple and white. When the fifth passage — referring to the Crucifixion itself — has been read, the priest comes out of the sanctuary holding a large wooden crucifix which he puts up in the middle of the church. Candles are attached to the top and the two side arms of the Crucifix. The faithful adorn it with wreaths of fresh or artificial flowers. The priest then goes on to read the remaining seven passages referring to

Christ's death and burial. The service ends very late in the night.

On the evening of Maundy Thursday, the spiritual participation of the faithful in the Passion begins to grow more intense. Women and girls attend all-night services in the churches; they become guardians and mourners of Christ as they do for their own dead. The long night is spent in singing hymns and popular songs telling the life and Passion of Christ, or a long religious poem, called 'The Virgin's Lament', describing with great simplicity and spontaneity the crucifixion of the Lord, His Mother's grief, and Her hope in the Resurrection: "Do you see that naked man hanging on the Cross — a blood-stained shirt upon his shoulders — a crown of thorns upon his brow? — He is your Son, and my Teacher. — 'Why do you not speak to me, my child — why do you not speak?' — 'What am I to say, Mother — it will not be any use to you. — Only wait for me on Holy Saturday — when the church-bells ring and the priests sing. — Then you too, Mother, will have great rejoicing'."

While the women sing these funeral hymns, young girls weave wreaths of flowers with which to decorate the *Epitaphion*, the wooden bier upon which Christ's body is to be laid next day (Good Friday).

In the eyes of the people the exceptional holiness of the Holy Thursday and Good Friday service endows all objects of worship used during the services (bread, oil, flowers, candles, etc.) with divine powers. The holy bread received during the Maundy Thursday service is usually placed in a little cloth bag with a few flowers from the Cross, and hung behind the family icons for curative purposes. Miraculous virtues are also ascribed to the candles lit during the reading of the Twelve Gospels. Seamen in particular take good care to secure one of the candles burning on the Cross. In

most places this candle is never lit, but kept as a talisman until the storms and rains of winter come. Then is the time to light the candle, for it will protect the house (or the ship) from lightning and will appease the storm.

In the island of Lemnos the womenfolk hang their children's kerchiefs by a string on the stand where the priest places the Gospel, so as to protect them from all evil. At the liturgy of the Twelve Gospels, the faithful place bottles of water under the Gospel. When the service is over, the priest puts these bottles under the altar, where they are to remain until Easter, at which time they are returned to their owners. This water is mainly used against sickness : if a member of the family is taken ill, he is sprinkled forty times with a bunch of sweet basil dipped in this water. The same is done for sick animals.

At Siyi, in Bithynia, when the time came for the priest to read the first Gospel passage, the children began writing down in all haste as many 'Credos' as they had time before the priest had finished reading all twelve passages. Just before the end of the service, the children burst into the church shouting triumphantly : "Credos for sale ! Credos !" These prayers were usually bought by old women and turned into talismans to be worn by the sick. At Ayiasso, in the island of Lesbos, the womenfolk hold a candle during the service of the Twelve Gospels and, as each Gospel passage nears its end, they make a cross of paper and wax. They collect twelve such crosses and stick them in the corners of their house to rid it of all harmful insects and animals.

It is a common belief that the souls of the dead are set free on Maundy Thursday, when the Saviour descends into the world below. For this reason it is the custom to visit the cemetery on this day and place offerings on the graves of the dead or distribute food in their memory. In Epirus it is customary to boil wheat grain and take it to church to be

blessed by the priest with the holy bread. The priest says a special prayer for the dead. It is believed that on Maundy Thursday "the souls of the dead come up from the world below and breathe again, in the same way as the resurrected Christ. They come out of Hades and inhabit the flowers in the field." The souls of the dead are believed to remain free for fifty days — until Pentecost (Whitsunday).

Good Friday.

Good Friday is a day of total fast and abstinence from work. Nearly the whole day is spent in attending the Descent from the Cross and the procession of the *Epitaphios* (Christ's funeral). The State participates officially in this ceremony. All offices and shops are closed. Flags are flown at half-mast. Sentries carry their arms reversed and church-bells ring a funeral knell. The people reverently follow the Passion in spirit. This desire to participate spiritually in the Divine Agony is manifest in several simple but striking popular customs. In the villages of Pylia the faithful drink vinegar mixed with soot for the love of Jesus, who was given vinegar to quench his thirst. On Good Friday the Cretans eat boiled food mixed with vinegar, and boiled snails, for their juice resembles bile. In most villages the faithful do not even light a fire in their kitchen or put a mouthful to their lips. Sometimes the cup of vinegar drunk in memory of Christ is mixed with spider's web instead of soot; the faithful must swallow three mouthfuls of this mixture.

Towards noon, when the Descent from the Cross takes place, the womenfolk start decorating the pall (a piece of gold-embroidered cloth representing His body) upon which the dead Christ is to be placed. Each family in the village send their share of flowers for the decoration. Violets, roses, stocks, lemon-blossom — all the flowers of

spring — are woven into wreaths and bunches and pinned to the pall, until it is literally smothered in flowers. As soon as the decoration is completed, the faithful begin flocking towards the church to worship the Epitaphios. Girls holding small baskets sprinkle the bier of Christ with lemon leaves and rose petals. The faithful kiss the edge of the Epitaphios and then pass stooping under it, in order that its Grace may touch them. In towns and villages where there is more than one church, the faithful try to visit all the Epitaphioi, or as many of them as they can.

At nightfall the Epitaphios is carried out of the church, and the funeral procession begins. The banners and the Cross come first, followed by the Bier, which is in turn followed by the priests. In the larger towns the whole procession is headed by a band playing funeral marches and by the State authorities. In Athens the Epitaphios is followed by the Archbishop, the Government, and the King's representative. The crowd following at the back hold candles made of pure brown wax; as the procession moves on, a broad flickering river seems to be streaming through the streets. The procession stops at every square and crossroad for the priests to say a short prayer.

In the villages the Epitaphios takes on a simpler and more picturesque aspect. Here is a typical description of the Good Friday procession as seen at Latsida, in Eastern Crete. On Holy Saturday, at dawn, the bell-ringers go from house to house waking the faithful by knocking two pieces of wood together. In the old days this was the most common way of calling the faithful to church; under Turkish rule the use of bells had been forbidden altogether. When the liturgy comes to an end, four men lift the Bier and carry it out of the church, preceded by the bell-ringers, the banners and the Cross. The procession goes round the whole village, halting before every church — even those which are out of

use — for a brief invocation. The last stop is at the cemetery, where the Epitaphios is carried over the graves. The procession then returns to the church; the four bearers stand at the door, holding the Bier high enough for the faithful to pass beneath it.

In several parts of Greece the villagers burn incense and light bonfires during the procession; it is not infrequent to see the effigy of Judas hoisted over the bonfire. Bonfires are also lit at Meligalà, in Messinia; when the church-bells ring for the Epitaphios, each housewife throws a handful of dry twigs across her threshold and sets fire to them. By the time the procession begins, the twigs have turned to ashes. As the holy Bier passes before her house, the housewife throws a handful of incense on the embers, and the priest — to reward her for having made the air smell sweetly for the passage of Christ's body — pauses to say a prayer for her. At Andritsaina, in the Peloponnese, it is the children's job to gather wood for the fire; they pile the wood in a heap before the church and light it at nightfall, but do not leap over it as on other occasions. At Kios, in the Propontis, the housewives keep their front doors open during the procession, to let in the Divine Grace. At Metrae, in Thrace, the procession halts before a small country chapel, where an armful of firewood has been stacked with an effigy of Judas propped in the middle of it. While the priest reads the Gospel passage referring to Judas' repentance and death, the villagers light the fire and burn his effigy. At the end of the service the faithful take a handful of ash left over from the fire and scatter it next day over the graves of their dead relations.

In the island of Lesbos there is a strong competitive spirit among the villagers as to who will build the largest fire. Once the fire is lit, they burn a Judas, beginning with his beard. Here, too, it is not customary to leap over the bonfire.

Worthy of mention is the following custom observed by the women of Serres. During the carrying round of the *Epitaphios*, they place the icon of Christ Crucified, together with the censer and a plate of fresh shoots of lentil or barley, which they have planted for this purpose on a certain day in Lent, before the threshold of the outer door. The custom is met with elsewhere in Greece and recalls that of the 'gardens of Adonis.' During the feast of Adonis the women, wearing mourning, used to display waxen effigies of Adonis on his death-bed. These idols were laid out, together with flowers and the so-called 'gardens', that is to say, pots in which they had planted fennel or other plants that grow and wither quickly, in order to symbolize the prematurely withered youth of Adonis or perhaps the speedily passing height of spring.

The candles and flowers of the Good Friday service — known as 'Christ-candles' and 'Christ-flowers' — are believed to have miraculous powers, like the candles of Maundy Thursday. In many villages they are distributed to the faithful by the priest himself. In Sparta, in the Peloponnese, after the procession of the *Epitaphios*, the verger strips the Bier of its decorations; he puts the flowers and candles away until the following day, when they are placed in a tray and distributed to the womenfolk by the priest. The village women keep the candles and flowers from the *Epitaphios* as a talisman against sickness. In the island of Paros the candles of the *Epitaphios* are used to appease storms.

Here are a few more Good Friday customs. In some districts, such as Koroni, in Messinia, the village-children go from house to house on the morning of Good Friday holding a cross and reciting the Passion. The housewives treat them to buns, red eggs, or money. At Telonia, in the island of Lesbos, the villagers rise early on Good Friday and

visit all country chapels, equipped with incense and candles. They must visit at least nine, sometimes even thirteen chapels. In many places it is the custom on Good Friday to visit the cemetery, lay wreaths on the graves, burn incense, etc. Another Good Friday custom is the Litany of the Crucified Christ. For instance, in the island of Zante, Christ is carried round the town in pomp at noon, escorted by a band and by marching soldiers. The renewal of yeast is another striking Good Friday custom. In Eastern Crete, while the priest reads the Good Friday passage from the Gospel, his wife must take flour and water and prepare some fresh yeast. The renewal of yeast may also be done with the flowers from the *Epitaphios*; for instance, at Lasithi, in Crete, after the Holy Saturday service, the village women take some petals from under the 'body' of Christ and boil them, using the water in which they have boiled them to make the yeast; an alternative method is to knead the yeast with hot water and then cover it with flowers from the *Epitaphios* until it rises.

Holy Saturday.

The sorrowful gloom of Good Friday begins to lift on Holy Saturday with the evening service of the First Resurrection, which is held in the morning of Holy Saturday. Noisy scenes take place in the church, with the priest's participation, probably for the purpose of frightening away the demon who hovers over the congregation in order to hinder the Resurrection and the salvation of mankind.

Here are some of the customs which best illustrate the spirit prevailing at this festival. In Athens and other towns the faithful decorate the church with bay branches and fill a basket with laurel leaves before the Holy Saturday service begins. At a given moment during the service, the priest emerges from behind the iconostasis, holding the

basket of laurel leaves, and says : "Arise, O God, to judge the world." After having said this, he scatters the bay leaves across the church. The womenfolk try to catch these leaves as they fly about the church, in order to burn them as a talisman against the evil eye, or put them among their woollens and blankets to keep them from moths, or to drive away mice. At Madytos, in Thrace, a bonfire is lit in the courtyard of the church on the morning of Holy Saturday, while the church-bells ring and guns are fired. At Koroni, in Messinia, if firearms are lacking, the villagers break a jug or a pan to the sound of the church-bells as soon as the priest begins scattering the bay leaves. In the island of Zante, it is the custom to throw out of the window any useless pot lying about in the house, for the joy of Christ and the shame of the Jews; while doing this, one must bite a key and say : "My head is iron, the Jews' head is but a hollow case." Then one must rub one's eyes with rose and lemon petals taken from the Epitaphios on Good Friday. In the old days it was the custom to place live wagtails under a mound of laurel leaves; when the priest cried : "Arise, O God," the faithful kicked the mound of laurel leaves apart and the birds flew away. These turbulent practices have caused a new expression to be coined in Greek : the phrase 'Arise, O God' is often used in modern Greek to denote a loud noise, an uproar, a scene of great animation.

The service held on the morning of Holy Saturday is known as the First Resurrection. When it is over, the faithful may freely turn their thoughts to the preparations for the great paschal festivities. The housewife must see to the baking of the Easter cakes and bread, while the man's job is to kill the paschal lamb. Those who have no lamb of their own choose one from the market, preferably white and a male.

The dead are not forgotten on this great day; many

families flock to the cemetery with the priest to hold a short service over the graves of their dead relatives; the children who attend this ceremony receive gifts of eggs, nuts, buns made with oil, etc. At Koroni, in Messinia, those who have suffered a recent family bereavement boil wheat grain and hand it round to their fellow-villagers with a slice of bread. It is generally considered necessary to help the poor as much as possible on this day. It is also considered fortunate to die on Holy Saturday, for one dies in the company of Christ.

Easter Sunday - The Resurrection.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most joyful festival of the Greek Orthodox Church and is celebrated as such by all Greeks, whether at home or abroad. In the old days the Easter service was held in the early morning of Easter Sunday, "in the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week" (Matthew). However, since several decades, it has become customary to hold the Easter Sunday service on Saturday night and to proclaim the Resurrection of the Lord at midnight precisely.

By Saturday evening the churches have shed the funeral aspect of the preceding days; they are brightly decorated with laurel and myrtle, and sprays of rosemary are scattered over the floor, all heralding the coming rejoicings. The faithful begin to flock to church in their best attire, if possible wearing new clothes, especially the children. If not all, at least part of the clothing must be new, preferably the shoes. Nobody fails to attend the Resurrection, except widows and those in mourning. The faithful hold white candles, instead of the funereal yellow candles of Good Friday. Special candles are bought for the children, decorated with white or blue ribbons, artificial flowers and gold

thread. It is the custom for young men to send their betrothed a candle decorated with white and pink ribbon and various other gifts, usually including a pair of new shoes which the fiancée will wear when she goes to the Resurrection service.

When the service begins, the church is but dimly lit. A moment comes when even these few lights are blown out. The church sinks into total darkness, symbolizing the darkness of the grave.

Suddenly the door of the sanctuary swings open, and the priest appears holding a lighted candle: "Come ye, partake of the never-setting Light and glorify Christ who is risen from the dead," he chants. The congregation crowd round to light their candles from the priest's. They pass on the light to their neighbours, until the whole church is ablaze with the new Light. In Kalavryta each family light their candles jointly, singing "Come ye, partake of the Light." At Rapsomati, in Arcadia, the first person to receive the Light must be a newly-married girl; after lighting her candle, she must kiss the priest's hand. In Athens girls make a point of lighting their candle from a man's, in order to get married soon.

After the whole congregation has partaken of the Light, the priest, followed by the banners, cantors and congregation, leaves the church and steps on to a rough scaffolding erected for this purpose outside the church. There he reads the Gospel passage describing the Resurrection. Finally, he triumphantly intones the psalm: "*Christos anesti*,"—"Christ is risen." The faithful accompany him swinging their candles rhythmically. The churchbells ring out joyfully; guns and fireworks are let off and ships at anchor sound their whistles. The faithful turn to each other and say: "Christ is risen!" and receive the reply: "*Alithós anesti*,"—"He is risen indeed," after which they exchange the kiss of the Resurrection.

The Resurrection of Christ is a signal for love and goodwill among men, and this is expressed by the kiss of the Resurrection. In some villages it is called the 'kiss of Love' (*Agápe*) and takes place within the church, in an atmosphere of solemnity. In the old days the inhabitants of the villages of Pylia used to walk out of the church after the service and wait outside in a file to be kissed by those who followed. First they shook hands, saying: "Christ is risen", and then kissed; quarrels and feuds were forgotten and forgiven.

In the island of Chios the kissing used to take place at a different moment: when the icon of the Resurrection and the book of the Gospels were brought out to be worshipped by the congregation. It was also the custom to exchange pews as a sign of love.

The ceremony of the Resurrection is always held in the open air, usually in the courtyard of the church. At the end of the service the icon of the Resurrection is carried round the church in pomp. In some places this is followed by a striking ritual: the entrance to the church is closed; behind it stands the verger, who represents the Devil; the priest, holding the icon, comes to the church entrance and says: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in." The verger asks: "Who is this King of Glory?" The priest replies: "The Lord of Hosts—he is the King of Glory." He pushes the door open with his foot and bursts into the church brandishing the Light. Thus is the Devil chased out of the church.

There exist several other customs attached to the Resurrection; the blessing of the red eggs, for instance. The 'eggs of the Resurrection', as they are called (or the 'eggs of the Good Word'), are believed to have miraculous qualities. This is how the blessing of the eggs used to be done at

Sinope : on Easter Sunday the housewife used to place in a basket as many eggs as there were people in the family, and took them to the Resurrection service to be blessed. In Western Macedonia the eggs are placed by the entrance to the sanctuary, under the icon of Christ. In the island of Seriphos they are placed beneath the tabernacle, so that the joyful "Christ is risen" is uttered over them. At Hassia, in Macedonia, after the service each parishioner breaks his own egg against the wooden clapper hanging outside the church which takes the place of a bell.

In some parts of Greece, not only the eggs but the paschal lambs as well are blessed and then distributed to the congregation by the priest. This portion of sanctified lamb must be carried home and a piece of it given to each member of the family in a spirit of communion.

On the way back home from the midnight service of the Resurrection one must try to keep one's candle alight until one reaches home; it is considered a good omen if one succeeds in bringing one's candle home without having let it go out once. Several customs are attached to this conveyance of the Holy Light to the family home; most of them derive from the belief in the miraculous power of the new Light. First, the sign of the cross is traced across the threshold of the house with the flame of the newly lit candle; sometimes this is also done to the windows and door-frames, in order to keep the Holy Light in the house all the year round. The candle is then used to renew the small light burning in front of the family icon-stand and the fire burning in the hearth; finally, barren trees and oxen are touched with the flame of the Easter candle in order to grow fruitful, or, in the case of the oxen, to be protected from flies in summer (Castoria, Crete, etc.). These customs are also to be found in Athens and in most parts of Greece. In the island of Hydra they appear in a

slightly different version : barren trees are burnt at the tips with a candle from the Resurrection. The Holy Light is also used as a protection against the evil eye and hail, and to quell storms — and, in general, to bring all enterprises to a good end; for instance, at Koroni, in Messinia, where the chief local products are bricks and charcoal, the first furnace is lit with a Resurrection candle.

There are several interesting customs connected with the trees in the orchards. Thus in Limassol, Cyprus, on the way home from church, it is considered a sacred duty to address the traditional Easter greeting, "Christ is risen", firstly to the trees in the family orchard. In the island of Carpathos, if a walnut-tree bears no fruit, after the Resurrection service the owner of the tree hits it three times with an axe, saying : "Christ is risen; either you will bear good walnuts or I shall cut you down."

In accordance with a very old custom, upon returning home from church after midnight, the faithful must share a late dinner consisting of various traditional dishes, such as the '*mayiritsa*', a soup made of the paschal lamb's intestines boiled with rice and dill, green salad with sardines, roast meat, cheese-pie or milk-pie (Epirus), etc. However, the first course is always red eggs, in accordance with the promise made on the last night of Carnival: "With an egg I close my mouth (Lent), with an egg I shall open it again (Easter)." It is also a very common custom to tap one egg against another, end on. Whoever succeeds in cracking somebody else's egg may claim the cracked egg as his own. In some parts of Greece the table is not cleared for three consecutive days; the crumbs are scattered over the vineyard, for this is supposed to ensure a good harvest.

It is natural that on such a day as Easter the thoughts of the family should turn to those who are missing from the feast. The belief that the souls of the dead come up from the lower

world from Easter to Whitsunday imposes upon the living certain duties, which are always reverently performed. Thus at Saranda Ekklesiès, in Thrace, the womenfolk go to the cemetery on the evening of Easter Sunday and burn incense over their family graves — for the dead have awakened with Christ. At Kastanià, in Lacedaemon, many families carry Easter food (red eggs, cheese, bread) to the cemetery after the service of the Resurrection, and place it on the graves of their dead relatives. This food is later collected by the children and the poor. At Koroni, widows must not eat the first plateful of food which their children place before them, but send it untouched to some poor and aged neighbour with a slice of bread; this is supposed to be the portion of their dead husband.

The First Week after Easter ('White Week').

The Easter celebrations last throughout the week that follows Easter Sunday, in accordance with a popular proverb determining the duration of the three great festivals of the year: "Three (days) for His Birth — three for Epiphany — and six for Easter."

The first week after Easter is known as the "White Week" or the "Bright Week" (Λαμπρή bright, another name for Easter). These appellations have given rise to various superstitions: no work is allowed in the fields during White Week for fear of hail, because hail is white; women must not use a white distaff for their spinning, because the colour white brings on hail. People avoid washing or wetting their hair during this week, for fear it should grow prematurely white. On the whole, little or no work is done during this week. Only one kind of work is permissible: both men and women may take their hoes and repair damaged bridges and roads, or level the village square.

In particular, the first two days after Easter — 'New' or 'White' Monday and 'New' or 'White' Tuesday — are celebrated as a continuation of Easter. The morning service held on 'White' Monday is not announced by the church-bells; yet, he who enters the church last, or after the reading of the lesson, is liable to a penalty — usually money, which is spent in offering the congregation a meal. In some villages the dancing that follows the 'White' Monday service presents the same importance as the festivities of Easter Sunday. At Vassilitsi, in Pylia, the dancing continues uninterrupted from dawn to sunset. Everybody takes part in it, old and young, men and women. The priest opens the dance with the Resurrection hymn, "Christ is risen", and his example is immediately followed by two or more separate rings of dancers, usually one for the men and one for the women.

Dancing on 'White' Tuesday is especially picturesque at Megara, in Attica, not far from Athens. Young girls and newly-married women put on their gorgeous costumes and dance the '*trata*' (i.e. the seine-net), a dance of very ancient origin, so called because the movements of the dancers recall those of fishermen hauling their nets out of the sea. In some places, such as Megara again, on 'White' Sunday or Saturday a group of village children (or men) go from house to house with a cross of flowers attached to a flagstaff, singing traditional songs known as '*Roussalia*'. In return, the housewives offer the children red eggs. Both the floral cross and the name given to this custom recall the Rosaria or Rosalia festival held by the Romans in memory of the dead; an essential feature of this festival was strewing the graves of the dead with flowers. The funeral customs observed long ago in Bithynia on 'New' Friday are also very striking: the families who had lost a son or a daughter within the year baked a number of

Easter buns and dyed a few red eggs; each bun had a red egg in the centre. On the morning of 'New' Saturday one of the daughters of the family stuck a flower — a rose or a carnation — in each bun, placed them all on a large tray and distributed them to the families who had attended the funeral.

Among the important days of the 'White' Week, Thursday should be mentioned on account of the festive dance traditionally held on this day to appease the North wind. It is only danced in some parts of Greece, such as Karystos, a small port in the island of Euboea. This is how it is done: during three weeks from Easter Sunday the Karystians hold special celebrations for the appeasement of the North wind, which ravages the island most of the year destroying vines, fruit-trees, corn crops, etc. On 'New' Thursday all the inhabitants of the small port of Phylagra, where there is a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, take part in a ceremony meant to quell the North wind; the main feature of this ceremony is a dance known as the 'Dance of Master North Wind'. This dance is also done at Artemon, on the island of Sifnos, but at a different date; the dancing begins after the evening service on Cheese Sunday (Carnival), with the priest leading the dancers, in a manner reminiscent of the ancient Greek *βορεάδες*. The reason for which this ceremony has been transferred from Carnival to 'New' Thursday is to be found in the relation between the word *Πέφτει* (Thursday, in demotic Greek) and *πέφτει* (it falls). According to popular belief, this word has the magic power to make the wind fall, particularly the North wind, which begins blowing in the central Aegean some time after Easter, causing much damage in the islands throughout the summer.

On 'New' Friday the Greeks feast the Virgin Mary under her attribute of *Zoodochos Piyi*, i.e. the Life-giving

Spring. A special service and procession is held on this day, followed by folk dances.

The Easter festivities reach their climax on the Sunday after Easter: Quasimodo, for the Catholics; Low Sunday, for the Anglo-Saxons; in Greek, the Sunday of St. Thomas. All candles left over from Easter are taken to church and lighted in front of the icons. The following day — Low Monday, or the Monday of St. Thomas, marks a return to everyday life: men go back to the fields, women pick up their spindles again; this has caused the Monday of St. Thomas to be called the 'Spindle-Resurrection'. In old Athens it was the custom to dedicate a new spindle to the family icons.

April 23rd, St. George's Day.

St. George, the Knight on the white horse, is among the most popular saints of Greece, and his feast is kept throughout the country. More than any other saint, perhaps, St. George is the incarnation of the ideal hero of antiquity. The hymns written for him incorporated at an early stage several ancient legends, and have thus caused him to be associated with the demigods and heroes of ancient Greek mythology.

In the Middle Ages the figure of St. George adorned the banners and pennons of the Byzantine Emperors, and it figures to this day on the regimental flags of the Greek Army of which he is the patron saint.

The miraculous exploits of St. George — how he slew the Dragon and rescued the Princess thrown as a prey to the beast in order to let the waters of the city run free — are vividly related in a popular song familiar to every Greek. In some parts of Greece the elements of this song have even infiltrated into the customs of popular worship. Thus at Arachova, near Mount Parnassus — a village under the

protection of the Saint—the evening service and procession during which his icon is carried round the village, are followed by dancing to the sound of bagpipes and drums; the dance is led by the old men of the village, who sing the song of St. George as they dance; meanwhile the water supply has been cut off; when the old men come to the verse which says: "Dragon, set free the water that the revellers may drink," the water in the communal tank is allowed to run free once more.

The exploits ascribed to the Saint, and the time of the year at which he is feasted, have led those who honour his memory to hold various athletic games on his nameday.

The games held at Arachova on St. George's Day are characteristic of the traditional athletic-loving spirit of the Greeks. The festivities last three days. On the first day the service is followed by 'the race of the old men'. The old men of the village go to a sharp slope covered with loose stones and race each other barefoot to the top; a lamb or a ram is placed at the summit of the slope for the winner; it is offered by the sheep-owners to bring good luck to their flocks. The second day is devoted to a jumping contest, and the third to wrestling matches and putting the weight. The contests are followed by dancing and a procession headed by the icon of the Saint.

In Arcadia, Messinia and the island of Lemnos the games also include horse-races: after the service, a number of horses, mounted by young men, race towards a large loaf of bread placed at a distance. The horseman who gets it must cut it up into slices and share it with the other competitors. At Basta, in Messinia, the Church Committee awards prizes: a saddle, set of harness, or a gun. In the Greek villages of Eastern Rumelia, not far from Mesimvria, the winner is the man who has defeated three consecutive opponents.

The shepherds of Greece pay St. George special homage. The reason for this is probably that his nameday coincides with the time when shepherds and flocks leave the folds and move up to the mountain pastures. Every year on St. George's Day lambs are sacrificed or offered to the church by all those who have made the Saint a vow in the hope of finding their lost sheep, or who have invoked his help in an hour of need. The sex and colour of the victim as well as the place of sacrifice are strictly fixed: as a rule, the lamb is white and a male. Various divinatory observations are made during the sacrifice. The meat is distributed, raw or cooked to the villagers. In the Pontus area it was the custom on St. George's Day to offer rams to the church; the animals were sold and the proceeds went to the church. In the old days the victim was made to trot round the church three times, after which the sacrificers made a small cut in the animal's ear and smeared the four corners of the church with the blood from its wound. After the sacrifice the meat was cooked and distributed to the congregation. Large beasts, such as calves, oxen, bulls, etc., were rarely sent to sacrifice.

Meanwhile, in their sheepfolds the shepherds hold special festivities in honour of their patron saint. Relatives and friends are invited to the fold and offered a large meal, consisting chiefly of 'the lamb of St. George'. In the villages of Pylia it is said that in the old days "every sheep-owner used to kill a fatted lamb dedicated to St. George, prepare *yoghourt* and cheese, bake milk-pies, and then sit among his shepherd friends and their relatives and make merry. At noon the priest visited each sheepfold in turn. The lamb's shoulder was reserved for him. Not a single morsel of St. George's lamb should be left over for the next day. Any remnants were passed round for the relatives to take home."

Various omens are drawn on this day concerning the future, the fate of the flocks, the coming crops, etc., by examining the other shoulder-bone of the lamb after the priest has received his share.

St. Demetrius' Day and St. George's Day are the two turning-points of the year. St. George's Day marks the beginning of the summer semester, and it is virtually the beginning of the year as far as working contracts and the engagement of shepherds are concerned. In the villages of Pylia all agreements used to be signed on St. George's Day; loans had to be returned on St. George's and no later; farm hands were paid or dismissed and new men engaged on this day. This accounts for the popular saying: "St. George's Day, first festival of the year."

IV. MAY

May 1st (May Day).

The first of May is celebrated throughout Greece as the festival of spring. The festivities commence at dusk on the eve of May Day by a general exodus to the gardens and fields for the purpose of making wreaths to welcome May. In the larger towns these wreaths are sold ready-made at the florist's; those who wish to be in keeping with tradition buy a wreath and nail it over their front door.

However, flowers may be a poetic symbol of joy and spring for the inhabitant of the city, but for the farmer they are sterile and useless things. They cannot symbolize what he holds most dear: the earth's protection and favour for a good crop and an abundance of fruit. For this reason farmers do not use flowers for their May wreaths, but various green plants and fruit, always including garlic (against the evil eye) and a thistle (against enemies). In the old days the

farmers of Pergamos used to go out into the fields on the eve of May Day and pick a cluster from any seed- or fruit-bearing tree or plant—wheat, barley, a fig branch hung with figs, garlic, onion, a branch of almond-tree loaded with almonds, a branch of a pomegranate-tree carrying a pomegranate—and hang them in a wreath at their front door. The wreath remained there until the feast of St. John the Reaper (June 24th), at which time it was taken down and thrown into the 'bonfire of St. John'.

At Kydoniae each May wreath used to contain garlic against the evil eye, a thistle against enemies, and a stalk of wheat for fertility. At Ayiasso, in the island of Lesbos, families who have unmarried daughters weave into their May wreath a wild plant with large leaves and yellow flowers, called '*daemonaria*' (the 'folly-plant'), in order to make possible suitors lose their heads.

As is often the case, on May Day individual ritualistic practices are reinforced by various collective actions similarly aiming at bringing to the village or city the joys and blessings of May. Thus in the old days, on the morning of May 1st, the children of Parga, in Epirus, used to go from house to house crowned with flowers and holding large sprays of orange and bitter-orange blossom. They halted in front of each house and sang the traditional May song: "May has come to us, the month of May—the month of May with its roses—the month of April with its flowers."

In the island of Corfu, it is the custom to carry a Maypole round the streets. The Maypole is made from a young cypress, straight and bushy at the top, crowned with a wreath of wild flowers, fruit and green vegetables; the foliage of the tree is interspersed with yellow daisies and other flowers, and hung with silk kerchiefs, girdles and ribbons. The Maypole is carried round the city or village by a group of young workers wearing white

trousers and shirts and a broad red belt and scarf. They sing the May song as they go, accompanied by a tambourine and an iron triangle.

In other villages, as at Aghios Lavrentios, near Volos, the month of May is impersonated by a 'May Boy': a child wreathed with flowers. A chorus of masked villagers accompany the boy on his round, singing May songs as he dances through the streets. In Naupactos (Lepanto) the May Boy is escorted by a group of old men in *fustanellas* (the national pleated skirt), who hold bells decorated with willow-blossom. The boy dances in the midst of the old men with wreaths of yellow daisies on his head, neck, arms and body, while the old men sound their heavy bells rhythmically and sing to him. The boy is offered various gifts: cotton, eggs, wheat, money; the shepherds give him a fleece. In the village of Kefalovryso the month of May used to be impersonated by a group of people instead of one. A number of villagers decked themselves with May flowers and went round the village, bell in hand, singing and dancing. Even to-day, on the eve of May Day, young and old men dance and sing all through the night with bells and walnut branches in their hands. We have also found this custom at Xerochori, in Euboea, combined with an invocation for rain. A village boy is wreathed with flowers, olive- and walnut-branches, and named for this occasion *Piperià* (pepper-tree). He wears a crown of flowers on his head and a bell around his neck. He is escorted by five or six fellow-villagers, and goes dancing from house to house, while his escort sing: "Pepper-tree, sweet pomegranate-tree—quickly, quickly to St. Elijah—that St. Elijah may go to God in Heaven—that God may send us rain—for our wheat and for our barley—and for the poor man's crop.—May each stalk yield a full measure, may the jars fill with wine—may the ditches fill with water.—Here comes Piperòs

with his hoe—to check the water." While the two last lines are sung, one of the group, playing the part of Piperòs, and also crowned with flowers, lightly digs up the earth with a hoe until the song comes to an end. The Pepper-tree symbolizes the force of Growth, Vegetation; he is therefore sprinkled with water by every family, in order to ensure rain for the crops.

May Day customs include several other mimetic practices expressing even more vividly the people's wish to participate in Nature's resurrection from the slumber of winter. The representation of Nature's awakening is still to be found, in a purely ancient form, at Zagori in Epirus. On May 1st—indeed, all through the spring—the shepherd girls of Zagori play a game called '*Zapheiri*'. A child—the May Boy—is made to lie down on the grass pretending to be dead. The shepherd girls adorn him with flowers and green boughs, then sit in a circle round him and start a lament: "See what a youth is fallen here, what a young cypress—he does not stir, he does not sway, his pride is gone.—Who has cut your strong roots and scared your crest—what have you done to me, my fine boy—what have you done, my heart?—Now that spring is here, now that summer's coming and the boughs are flowering, the meadows turning green now that the birds of spring have come and the swallows are here—must you, my fine boy, lie in the dark earth?" At the end of the song, all the girls cry in chorus: "Arise, Zapheiri, arise." The boy leaps to his feet, and they all dance across the meadows singing. This custom certainly derives from the ancient festival of Adonis, which was similarly held in spring and symbolized the resurrection of Nature. This is but one among many proofs of the unbroken continuity of Greek tradition. The same custom, under the name of '*Fouskodendri*', is to be found at Kastanià in the district of Stymphalia.

There is a host of other May Day customs deriving from the belief that *May renews everything*. On May 1st a new life begins for both nature and man. For this reason many Greeks believe that all household articles must be renewed at that time. Every single jug in the house must be emptied on the eve of May Day; next morning, at dawn, the girls take the jugs or pitchers to the fountain, smear them with butter, decorate them with flowers and fill them with fresh water. This water is sprinkled over the pails and tubs used for churning milk, and over the sheep in the fold. In the villages where water is supplied from wells, as at Xerochori in Euboea, the village girls also decorate the wells with flowers, and then dance round them singing May songs.

In most coastal areas the sprinkling is done with sea water brought over from the shore at dawn. A sprig of olive is dipped into the sea water, and the whole house is sprinkled with it as on the eve of the Epiphany. The green sprig is a symbol of fertility, and man tries to communicate this power to all things capable of giving birth or bearing fruit. This also explains why on May Day the inhabitants of Pontus urge on their cattle to the pastures with three green boughs, one from a hazelnut-tree, the other from a wild rose-bush, and the third from some other wild shrub, believing that this will turn the beasts into good breeders. As the cattle-owners drive the beasts with these three boughs, they mutter to themselves: "A thousand heads, a thousand heads."

However, May presents one danger, and that comes from its name. The word 'May' is very similar to the word *μάγια*, (*mayia*), which means: magic. For this reason May is considered favourable to magic-working practices. It is believed that magic spells are particularly effective at that time. Many precautions must be taken on May Day

to protect one's house, fortune and children from the influence of evil. In Eastern Crete, on May Day, children are marked across the brow with pitch; this is also done to the front door. In other parts of Greece it is thought preferable to sew some garlic or cloves to the children's clothes. On the eve of May Day the women of Ayiasso, in the island of Lesbos, dip their fingers in honey and trace the sign of the cross over their front door, so that the young men may 'stick' to the house for good as they pass. On the morning of May Day, again, the women of Ayiasso hasten to put something in their mouths — a fig or a tender vine-shoot, or holy bread from the Maundy Thursday service — the moment they wake up, because if they happen to hear a donkey braying on an empty stomach nobody will believe in what they say!

It is strange that this happy month of flowers should have given birth to such a host of dark superstitions. The month of May, the people say, is strewn with numerous and varied dangers. One should not cut material for clothing, or marry during this month, for "May will carry one away". Nor is it wise to travel in May. Prospects are even darker if May happens to begin on a Saturday, which accounts for the popular saying: "When May comes on a Saturday, many shrouds descend to Hades." It is also bad luck to plant or transplant flowers in May; it means that the planter will die and the flowers be laid on his coffin.

These superstitious fears centre chiefly around May 1st, but the two following days — St. Athanasius' (May 2nd) and St. Mavra's (May 3rd) — are not devoid of them either. On St. Mavra's Day, (*Mavra* means black), if one cuts or sews clothing, or does any handwork, black spots will appear on one's hands. No cloth is bleached on this day, for fear it should turn black, and all activities which are not absolutely safe are generally avoided.

**May 21st, the feast of St. Constantine and St. Helena.
The 'Anastenaria'.**

This is the most important feast-day in May. The Greeks have retained a vivid memory of Constantine the Great and his saintly Mother; besides, Constantine was also the name of the last Emperor of Constantinople (Constantine Palaeologos) and has thus become one of the names held dearest by the Greeks. Churches dedicated to this Saint are very numerous, and great festivities with processions and folk-dancing are held on his nameday. In some parts of Greece the festivities include the sacrificing of bulls or rams for the happiness of the community. The feast usually ends up with games and dancing.

Here we must mention a peculiar custom which was primarily to be found in a small area near Agathoupolis, in Eastern Thrace, but which later spread to Macedonia, where the Greeks from this area settled after the exchange of populations effected in 1923. This custom—or rather ceremony—is called '*Anastenaria*', and was to be found in its most perfect form in the small Thracian village of Kosti, which was closely associated with these two saints.

The worshippers of St. Constantine—not all, but those only who are possessed by the Saint—are called *Anastenarides*; they form a kind of religious brotherhood, headed by one of the older or more capable *Anastenarides*, called the *Archianastenaris*. The seat of this brotherhood is usually a particular building or a room set apart in the Chief *Anastenaris*' house. This is where the brotherhood guard the 'Graces' or 'Sires' (portable icons hung with bells picturing St. Constantine and St. Helena dancing together) for the whole duration of the feast. Dancing, as we shall see, is the fundamental element of the *Anastenarides*' cult. In this building or room, called '*konak*' (a Turkish word), the group also keep a variety of musical instruments throughout the year:

the great sacred drum, the one-stringed fiddle, the flute and the bag pipe; there they also keep the sacred axe, the chopping-block and the knife which are to be used to kill the sacred bull. This bull is bought with the common funds of the group and sacrificed in great pomp on the Saint's nameday. Not any bull will do: it must be black, three years old, 'perfect' (not gelded), and untainted by the touch of harness.

The place of worship in the village of Kosti used to be situated by the sacred springs of St. Constantine, ten minutes from the village. The springs were surrounded by a forest of oak-trees covering about ten acres and enclosed by a thick fence of oak trunks. On May 2nd the villagers began clearing the space surrounding the springs and cleaning the small building which housed the holy icons. When the cleaning was finished, the priest blessed and sprinkled the place with holy water; this was followed by folk-dancing for women only. Timber from the fence, amounting to about six or seven cartloads, was carried to the village square on the eve of the feast. This timber was intended for the great fire on which the *Anastenarides* would dance and the sacred bull would be cooked after the sacrifice. On the eve of the feast, the bull was led to the village church in pomp, escorted by the icons and the musicians, and crowned with coloured ribbons and flowers. He was tied up in the church courtyard until the moment of sacrifice.

Towards evening, when all these preparations were completed, a procession headed by the musicians and the great drum left the '*konak*' and marched to the church. The *Archianastenaris* entered the church, kissed the icons of Christ and Mary, and handed the icons of St. Constantine and St. Helena to his fellow-*anastenarides*. The procession then went round the village, ending up at the village square, where one of the villagers set fire to the pile of oak-wood.

Lighting the fire was a very ancient, traditional privilege handed down from father to son in a given family. The Chief Anastenaris began dancing round the fire; he was soon followed by the other Anastenarides, holding the sacred icons. The rhythm, quite slow at first, gradually gathered speed. The dancers gave out short loud gasps, or sighs, as they danced; this accounts for their name : *anastenaris*, from '*anastenazo*' (ἀναστενάζω: to sigh). The men and women of the village then gathered into another dancing-group encircling the Anastenarides, or sat down in a circle to watch. A profusion of wine and spirits helped to heighten the passionate spirit of the dance, until the Anastenarides, in a state resembling a trance, danced across the flames bare-footed, and sometimes trampled on the burning embers for several minutes. The dancing continued for many hours. While it lasted, some of the dancers or the onlookers would go into a kind of fit, or, to use the villagers' expression, were 'touched by the Saint'.

Walking over the fire unhurt is one of the most weighty proofs of the dancer's holiness. "The icon", say the villagers, "summons only him who is clean." Only such a man will the Saint possess, only through the mouth of such a man will he speak. After a few inarticulate cries, the frenzied dancer shouts : "Make your vows ! Make your vows to the Saint !" Upon hearing this, the onlookers promise various gifts to the church in the name of the Saint. Then the dancer cries : "Restore justice, lest the Saint destroy you." Each man tries to remember any injustice he may have committed in the past, in order to set it right.

Thus the ceremony takes on both a religious and a moral character. The Anastenarides, being the bearers of God's spirit, make various prophecies by questioning the icon of St. Constantine.

The sacrifice of the sacred bull, who has been waiting

since the eve of the feast in the church courtyard together with several other victims, takes place after the service. The priest blesses the victims; with the Saint's icon the Chief Anastenaris makes the sign of the cross over the bull's head; then he proceeds to sacrifice it with care, so that the blood will flow over the foundations of the church. The raw meat of the victim is then distributed to the villagers; the bull's hide is cut in to broad strips and made into sandals, each family in the village being given a pair.

The dancing on the square round the fire, the procession of the Anastenarides with their musical instruments through the village, and the all-night services in the church continue for eight days on end. During these eight days the holy signs are repeated : new candidates to membership of the brotherhood dance over the fire and are accepted as Anastenarides. This entitles them to hang a lantern at their front door, signifying that this is the abode of an Anastenaris.

It is also the custom to make nocturnal outings from one village to another, because the Saint (i.e. his icon) in one village must visit his 'brother' in the other village. The mountain roads are dotted with the flicker of torches, and the silence of the night is filled with the thud of the sacred drum and the shrill notes of the flute. The musicians are followed by the Anastenarides, still holding the sacred icons and dancing their strange, frenzied dance as they go.

We shall not go into the history and interpretation of this peculiar custom, since the information we possess on this subject does not go beyond the 12th century. It is very probable, however, that the '*Anastenaria*' are an ancient, pre-Christian heritage originating from the orgies of Dionysiac worship. It is not without significance that the cradle of Dionysiac worship was precisely in the Haemus area where the '*Anastenaria*' are danced to-day, passed down by the Greeks to the neighbouring Bulgarian

villages. Moreover, one of the essential features of Dionysiac worship was the state of *'μαίνεσθαι'* (to be in a frenzy), and *'Maenads'* was the name given to the women who rushed in a frenzy over the mountains at night, lighted by torches and goaded on by the wild music of the deep-throated flutes and the thundering drums.

The Assumption.

The Greek Orthodox Church celebrates the Assumption of Jesus Christ forty days after Easter. Easter is usually in April, which makes the Day of the Assumption essentially a May festival. It is a common belief that at midnight on Assumption Day the heavens burst asunder. In some villages those who are pure of heart stay up all night to see a light ascend to heaven.

In the coastal areas of Greece, it is the custom for all the villagers, old and young, to go down to the sea and have their first swim. Those who do not wish or are unable to swim — usually the womenfolk — take some sea-water (it must be taken from forty different waves) and sprinkle their house with it, saying: "As Christ rose to heaven, so may calumny, sickness, the evil eye and all other evils rise from our house and disappear." In the island of Samos the sea-water is kept throughout the year and used as a balm against snake-bites, swelling, and aches of every kind. Whenever the household is afflicted with sickness or the evil eye, or if a man with an 'unlucky step' enters the house, the sea-water is once again sprinkled all over the house. In addition to sea-water, one must also take a seaweed-covered stone from the sea and place it under the family bed for luck. Unmarried girls put the stone under their bed after having made the sign of the cross with it three times, saying: "As our Lord Jesus Christ gave us the revelation of His Assumption, so may he reveal to me the man who is destined to be my

husband." It is believed the future husband will thus appear in their dreams. In the old days the men and women of Kydoniae, in Asia Minor, used to go down to the sea on Assumption Day and draw water from forty waves; then they crossed themselves and took leave of Christ: "Fare well, dear Lord; go on your way." It was also customary to burn incense over the sea.

In the mountainous areas of Greece the festivities center round the sheepfolds instead of the sea. Assumption Day is held in great honour by the shepherds and sheep-owners of Greece. For instance, the shepherds of Aetolia consider the Assumption as the greatest feast-day of the whole Orthodox calendar. The priest is invited to the fold to bless the sheep. Many guests — mostly relatives — are invited to the ceremony and are later offered a huge meal. The main dishes are made of milk or cheese. The sheep-owner does not keep a single pint of the milk he has drawn that day; it all goes into making cheese for the priest, and *yoghourt* and other dishes for his guests. The party continues till late at night and ends up with dancing and playing with swings. If any milk is left over, it must be thrown away (Lesbos).

The magic virtues ascribed to this day work upon the imagination of the shepherds in various ways: for instance, they fear that the sheep's milk may be 'withdrawn', as Christ was 'drawn up' to heaven. The meaning and often merely the sound of the word 'Assumption' (*Analipsis*) has given rise to several other superstitions. On Assumption Day the village women pick various curative herbs and gather clay or mud for their house-cleaning; they believe that the nature of the day on which the plants are picked will cause all diseases (especially skin diseases) to 'withdraw'. For the same reason, the gathering of clay takes place with special solemnity.

Another belief particular to this day is that the freedom which the souls of the dead have enjoyed since Easter comes to an end with Christ's Assumption to heaven as soon as the Resurrection hymns cease to be sung in church. The dead hover around a little longer, waiting for their last plate of *kollyva* before they depart (Sinope). For this reason in some villages the womenfolk gather at a neighbour's house towards noon and sit conversing together as if they were keeping a vigil over a dead man, because that is the time when the souls of the dead go back to Hades after their forty days of liberty. However, the most common belief is that the souls of the dead remain outside Hades not for forty days but fifty, which explains why the customs connected with the cult of the dead take place ten days later, at Pentecost (Whitsunday).

Pentecost (Whitsunday).

The Saturday of Pentecost is also called All Soul's Day (in Greek : Soul-Saturday of May), or the Saturday of *Rousalia* (from the Latin word '*Rosaria*'). Like the ancient Greeks, the Romans believed that the souls of the dead returned at given times to the world of the living. The most important among these occasions was the three-day festival of the Lemures (May 9th, 11th and 13th), when offerings to the dead also included flowers.

On the Saturday of Pentecost, *kollyva* or slices of bread, cheese and other food are sent to the church to be blessed by the priest, and then to the graveyard, where they are finally distributed among the poor. The belief that on the following day the vagrant souls will once more be imprisoned in Hades deeply stirs the people's imagination. This feeling is eloquently expressed by the popular saying : "May all Saturdays come — may they all come and go — but the Soul Saturday of May — may it never come!" As for the

fate which awaits the souls of the dead upon their return to Hades, this is how popular belief pictures it : "The souls of the dead", says a peasant-woman from Thrace, "don't want this Saturday to come, because on the following day they must go back to their place, they will be locked up and weep. From Easter to Whitsun they sit about in the world outside, on the trees and the vines — that is why we never cut any branches or vine-leaves during this time, because the souls might fall off and cry. We don't sweep away the cobwebs from the ceilings and walls of our houses, because the souls like to sit on the webs; and if we put the wash out to dry (especially linen), we take care to bring it in before sunset, so that the souls won't go and sit on it at night. If we forget to bring in the wash at sunset, then we leave it out all night and rinse it next morning with fresh water."

Whitsunday is commonly known as 'Kneeling Sunday', because on this day the priest makes three invocations during which the whole congregation and the priest himself remain in a kneeling position. One of these invocations is a prayer for the repose of the dead. The customs attached to it are significant of the people's beliefs concerning the dead. On Whitsunday the inhabitants of Castoria, in Western Macedonia, bring to church bunches of flowers picked from their gardens; they place these flowers on the ground in front of them as they kneel, and light a candle to light the way for the departing souls. At Kostarazi, a village near Castoria, the faithful bow their heads very low and cover their eyes with leaves or rose petals, for, if their eyes remain open when the souls of their dead relatives pass by, there will be recognition and tears and sorrow at this new separation, and the souls will refuse to leave with the others. Similar customs are to be found in nearly all the Greek provinces. Offerings to the dead (*kollyva*, etc.) are

especially common. In the Aenos area, in Thrace, the faithful bring milk-puddings and pies to church to be eaten in the narthex by the whole congregation after the service, for the remission of the sins of the dead.

The feast of the Holy Ghost or the Holy Trinity.

Whit-Monday is dedicated to the Holy Ghost or the Holy Trinity. Wherever there is a church named after the Holy Trinity — especially in Thrace — a religious festival is held which includes the sacrificing of lambs and a large communal meal. In Zante there is a custom known as the 'Wheel': children who have recovered from serious illness are made to sit round a wheel. The people of Cyprus have a custom known as the '*Kataklysmos*' (The Flood), i.e. collective bathing in the sea. In some places, such as Pontus, offerings to the dead and meals taken on or round the graves used to continue until Whit-Monday; the inhabitants used to offer the dead rice-pudding and sour milk on this day. Before setting off for the graveyard meal, it was believed necessary to swallow three spoonfuls of sour milk.

I. JUNE

Harvest Customs.

In nearly the whole of Greece, June is a month devoted to the harvest. The farmers are busy in the fields, for there is much to be done in this month. For this reason they do not have time to celebrate the feast-days of the June saints as elaborately as those of other saints.

However, there do exist certain religious customs, directly connected with the harvest, which are widely spread throughout Greece and are of some interest. Most of these customs center around the first and the last day of the harvest. In the island of Skyros the harvest begins as follows: a large stone is placed before a furrow in the field; the farmer makes the sign of the cross over it three times, saying: "May the grain, and we the reapers, be as strong as this stone." There are several other practices believed to make the reaper's work easier: for instance, taking a wheatstalk from the first two sheaves and sticking it at the back of one's belt, so that one's waist will not grow stiff with stooping; or, throwing a handful of herbs into the dish which is to be eaten on the first day of the harvest, so as to strengthen the reapers. These customs are accompanied by other more formal practices of a deeper significance. At Drymos, in Macedonia, the first sheaf of wheat is propped up in the field and the reapers kneel before it, while the landowner scatters a handful of coins among them. The first harvest meal always consists of a pie.

The customs celebrating the end of the harvest are far

more numerous. In most rural areas of Greece a cruciform plot of field is left unreaped, or is reaped crosswise, the reapers having previously crossed themselves. The last sheaves reaped from this plot are made into one large cruciform sheaf (other shapes may also be given to it) and hung from the master-beam of the house as a talisman after the harvest is over. When the time for sowing comes, the grains from this sheaf are taken to church and blessed by the priest, and then mixed with the other seed. The inhabitants of the island of Skyros prefer to leave this last plot unharvested as the field's own share, 'for the joy of the land,' as they say, or for birds and beasts to feed on. In Messinia the last unreaped sheaves are called 'the ploughman's beard'. The wheatstalks are thus identified with the beard of the farmer, whom the reapers carry on their shoulder and refuse to put down until he has promised them a chicken and wine — a custom analogous to that in Switzerland, Bavaria, France and Norway, where the reapers bind the farmer with wheatstalks and will not let him go unless he pays them a ransom.

In some parts of Greece the reaping of the last sheaves is done in a very peculiar manner. At Vourvoura, in Cynuria, a plot of oats is left unreaped until the last day of the harvest. Then all the reapers gather round it and reap it in great haste; when they have done, they throw away their sickles and cry: "Catch him! Catch him!" as if a ghostly shape were escaping across the field. In the island of Lesbos, when two adjacent fields are being reaped, it is the custom for the reapers to hold a reaping competition: the men who finish first will, as they say, hunt the hare in the neighbour's field. The winner also believes that his victory will make his crops more abundant next year.

All these customs are founded on a common symbolism: the spirit of Growth, of Vegetation, which is supposed to

roam across the fields, is gradually forced to retreat before the reaper's sickle, until it is left with only a few odd stalks. These last stalks are believed to contain the powers of Vegetation and Fertility, and are therefore left uncut, or woven into a cross and taken home as a sacred talisman until next year, so that the powers concealed within them may be passed on uninterrupted to the next crops.

June 24th, St. John the Baptist's Birthday.

St. John the Baptist's birthday is undoubtedly one of the most important June festivals, and the customs attached to it still survive not only in the countryside but in most Greek towns. This festival has been given various names, according to the beliefs and customs connected with it in each area. The most common appellation is St. John the Diviner, owing to the various divinatory customs proper to this day. In other areas it is known as the feast of St. John *Lambrophoros* (bearer of brightness), because of the bonfires lit in the streets or the fields on the eve of the feast. In other villages, again, it is called the feast of St. John of the Solstice, because this feast-day coincides with the summer solstice, and various customs of the ancient Greeks connected with the solstice have remained attached to it.

In many villages it is believed that on St. John's Day the sun 'quivers, or turns, or grows dim'. For this reason the inhabitants of Komotini, in Thrace, rise early on this day in order to see the sun turning like a 'windmill or a wheel', as they say. In the old days the inhabitants of Sinope, in Pontus, went even further: they stayed up all night in groups, spending the long hours dancing, eating and drinking; at daybreak they put the cook in a great cauldron; four men passed a piece of wood through the handles and lifted it up, while the others danced round the unfortunate woman; dancing the whole way, they

reached a country-place called Phoinikida, not far from the village; there they waited for sunrise, in order to see how the sun would 'turn' and how it would emerge from the horizon. The dancing continued all the way back to the village, until the revellers reached the church. At Nenita, in Chios, when the villagers come out of church, they gather on the threshing-floors in groups and, after having eaten a large amount of fruit, spend the rest of the time until noon in a kind of winding dance, imitating the 'turning' of the sun.

The most typical custom on St. John's birthday is the lighting of bonfires. Bonfires are lit on the eve of St. John's in front of every house or in the middle of the street. Sometimes three fires are lit in a row and then leapt over by each member of the family. Each household throws into its bonfire the withered May wreath, the branches on which their silkworms have rested, and the crown of St. John, which we shall mention again in the following pages. The village boys gather timber, twigs, dry leaves and bramble for the bonfire; they go out hunting for firewood in groups or singly, competing against each other as to who will build up the largest bonfire. In the Chalcidice area, in Macedonia, the gathering of firewood is done with special pomp: all the young boys and bachelors of the village go to the nearest wood and cut down a tree about 15 or 20 feet high. The lower branches are shorn off and carried back to the village by the younger children. The older boys drag the trunk to the village with the help of ropes, singing and uttering wild, joyful cries. The trunk and lower branches are placed in one of the village court-yards and guarded jealously, for fear of their being stolen by another group of young wood-cutters. In case of an attack of this kind, the village echoes with the sound of Homeric battles. On the eve of the feast the trunk is propped up in

a square and the lower branches placed round it in pyramid shape. The fire is lighted at sunset. The whole neighbourhood then begin dancing round it, holding hands. When the flames reach the trunk, it is thrown down and the dancers begin leaping over the flames. The younger boys are the first to start, each one trying to jump higher than the boy before him. The old men and women wait until the fire is reduced to a small heap of glowing embers and jump as best they can for luck. When the fire has gone out completely, the village women scoop up a handful of ashes, to take home for protective and divinatory purposes. Various wishes and prayers are said during the leaping of the fire, such as: "I leave the bad year behind in order to enter a better year," or "I leap over the fire so that sickness will not touch me," or "Dear St. John, may I be cured," which proves that the ancient significance of leaping over a fire — purification from all evil by the power of fire — still unconsciously survives in the popular imagination.

The custom of lighting bonfires on June 23rd still exists not only in the country but also in the cities. This is especially true of the outer suburbs of Athens, inhabited mainly by Greek refugees from Asia Minor, who have remained particularly attached to their old traditions.

Here is another striking custom which was to be found in earlier times in Northern Greece (Macedonia, Thrace and Eastern Rumelia in particular): the inhabitants of these areas used to celebrate the feast of St. John with masquerades and processions of boys and girls escorting the *Kalinitsa*, that is to say the most beautiful girl in the neighbourhood. The most picturesque version of this custom was to be found at Stenimachos, in Eastern Rumelia, where each neighbourhood elected their own *Kalinitsa*, who had to be under 13 years of age. On the eve of the feast

all the boys and girls of the neighbourhood gathered at the *Kalinitsa's* house and dressed her up like a bride. Four girls helped her to dress, pinned on her veil and hung a garland of flowers round her neck; she was also made to hold a bunch of flowers. The procession was then formed, headed by a young boy holding a rod. He was followed by the *Kalinitsa*, who was followed in turn by four 'ladies in waiting' and a little girl holding an open parasol over the *Kalinitsa's* head. Twelve other girls walked at the *Kalinitsa's* side, and the procession was completed by a group of boys also carrying rods. The procession went round the village singing: "My beautiful Kalinitsa, my young bride—my mother sent me to the well for water—for cool water—to water the sweet basil."

If two processions met at a crossroad, each parasol-bearer lowered her parasol over the bride's face so that the two *Kalinitsas* would not set eyes on each other. Next day (St. John's Day) the children gathered once again at the *Kalinitsa's* house, bringing trays of food and sweets. They all went to the country with their families and spent the day eating and dancing on the grass. An analogous custom is to be found to-day among the *Sarakatsanaioi*, the nomad shepherds of Mount Pindos. On the eve of St. John's, the shepherds' children gather in groups to pick flowers, known as *kaloyannides* ('good-Johnnies'), with which they make wreaths for their heads. They fill a bronze jug with water from three fountains and go from sheepfold to sheepfold singing and dancing. A little water from the jug is poured in front of every sheepfold. In return the shepherds give the children cheese, coins, or anything else they choose.

There exist several divinatory customs connected with St. John's Day: various omens are drawn from dreams, ash taken from the bonfire of St. John, fruit (fruit-divination is always held at midnight on the eve of the feast), molten

lead, eggs, water (this is done over the well), shadows (the shadow made by the sun when it rises on June 24th), etc. However, the favourite method of divination throughout Greece is the *Klidonas*, which has given its name to the Saint (St. John Klidonas, i.e. St. John the Diviner). The word 'Klidonas' is a survival from ancient Greek, but its meaning is no longer the same. In ancient Greek the word 'κλήδονας' meant a voice heard by accident and taken as a presage; to-day the word means κληρομαντεία (κλήρος: vote, μαντεία: divination). The preparations for the *Klidonas* are as follows: A 'lucky' boy or girl (i.e. a child whose parents are both alive) takes some 'speechless' water from the well or fountain; this means that the child must carry the water secretly, without accosting or answering any person it meets on the way. The other village boys and girls wait for the child at a neighbouring house; when it returns from the fountain or well, they each throw some personal article into the pitcher of 'speechless' water: a ring, an earring, an apple with their initials engraved on the skin in clover. The pitcher is covered with a red cloth, locked up and exposed to the stars all night.

In some parts of Greece the preparations for the *Klidonas* are accompanied by various other practices. For instance, in the island of Lemnos the village girls take a long pillow and shape it into a doll; the doll's hands are crossed and locked across its chest; it is then propped up on the steps of the back-door, where it is guarded until nightfall by a group of singing and dancing girls. After sunset the girls fill a pitcher with 'speechless' water, throw in their rings, earrings, etc., and lock up the pitcher, saying: "Lock up the *Klidonas*, by the Grace of St. John—and he who is fortunate—will be shown his good fortune in the morning." The girls stay up all night guarding the pitcher. At Castoria it is the custom to decorate the *Klidonas*: a

thistle, brought down from the mountain by a young boy, is placed in the mouth of the pitcher; fruits of the season are stuck on the thistle and flowers on its crest. The pitcher is opened at sunrise, following a strictly determined ritual: the pitcher is placed in the middle of the courtyard; the village girls sit round it in a circle, waiting to hear their fortunes told. The pitcher is usually opened by the same child who locked it up the night before; in some places, as at Koroni in Messinia, the child is first covered with the red cloth which has covered the pitcher during the night. Meanwhile the girls sing in chorus: "Open the *Klidonas*, by the Grace of St. John — and he who is fortunate — will instantly stand revealed." The child who had brought out the pitcher (or one of the girls) then puts his hand inside and draws out the trinkets one by one, while the girls sing divinatory, satirical or laudatory couplets. A couplet is sung for each person taking part in the divination ceremony; the announcement of each new name — as the trinket belonging to that person is drawn from the pitcher — is received with laughter, shouting and comments.

On the northern coast of Greece, sea-bathing begins on St. John's Day instead of Assumption Day. On St. John's Day all the inhabitants of Telonia, on the island of Lesbos, go down to the sea to bathe; each villager wears a shoot of osier at his waist or on his head, in order to keep strong and healthy. It is also the custom to eat water-melon the beach. This accounts for the motto: "Do not swim before you see water-melon peel floating on the sea." The water-melon is a sign that summer has truly set in. In Pontus, groups of villagers used to lie in ambush at the crossroads for the first passer-by; this unfortunate person was carried down to the beach and thrown into the sea with all his clothes on. The victim's only chance of being spared this ordeal was to promise everyone a drink. At

Madytos, in Thrace, the bathing was preceded by horse-racing. The racing began at sunrise, and there was heavy betting. The villagers used to bathe fully dressed. In the afternoon there were sailing contests with ordinary fishing-boats and sponge-fishing craft.

June 29th and 30th — the Apostles Peter and Paul, and the Twelve Apostles.

The last two days of June are dedicated to the memory of Christ's Apostles. Peter and Paul are feasted on June 29th. As this is also the nameday of the present King, official services are held in all the churches, and the evening service is sung on the eve of the feast on the hill of the Areopagus, where St. Paul spoke to the Athenians. The service is conducted by the Archbishop of Athens and attended by a large crowd.

On the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, as well as on the following day, which is the feast of the Twelve Apostles, young girls of marriageable age perform various divination practices regarding their future marriage; they use molten lead, water, mirrors or eggs.

II. JULY

Threshing Customs.

July is the time when farmers in Greece thresh their wheat; for this reason it is called the 'Thresher'. The whole of this month is spent out in the fields, by the haystacks. In the mountain villages, where modern threshing-machines are still unknown, the threshing is done by horses or oxen trampling over the wheat in circles on a leash secured to a central pole.

A number of customs are attached to the opening of

the threshing season, and even more so to the end of it. In the island of Skýros, before they begin to thresh their wheat, the richer farmers ask the priest to hold a short service in the fields; the threshers who are to start work on that day must be spotlessly clean. At Lasithi, in Crete, when the threshing is over, the threshers gather the grain in a large heap, make the sign of the cross over it and stand round it in a circle. Then they stick a shovel into the heap, handle downwards. They bow three times, take a handful of grain, bow again, drop the grain over the shovel and kneel three times. It is only after this ceremony has been completed that they begin putting the grain into sacks. At Ghouvès, in the island of Euboea, after the grain has been heaped into the shape of a cross, the farmer's wife offers each thresher water from a pitcher. The thresher rinses his hands in the water and sprinkles the grain with his dripping fingers, saying 'many happy returns of the day'. Finally the farmer's wife must run round the heap in a wide circle, holding the pitcher tipped forward without spilling a single drop of water; as she does this, she prays that next year the heap may be as large as the circle she has traced.

July 2nd, Our Lady the Sheaf-Burner.

A whole year's toil thus lies exposed in an inflammable heap to the dangers of fire or storm. Disasters of this kind are naturally considered as a sign of divine wrath, or as a punishment sent by one of the saints presiding over the month of July, offended because his feast-day has not been properly kept. Thus the feast of the Virgin on July 2nd (the date on which Her tunic was brought to the church of Blachernae, in Constantinople) is commonly known as the feast of Our Lady the Sheaf-Burner; this attribute was given to the Virgin because it is believed that She burns the sheaves of those who do not abstain from work on Her feast-day.

July 7th and 17th, the feasts of St. Kyriaki and St. Marina.

St. Kyriaki and St. Marina inflict a similar punishment on those who do not respect their memory. The farmers tell many stories illustrating striking instances of the Saints' wrath. One of them relates how a priest in Arcadia, who threshed his wheat on St. Marina's Day, was swallowed up by the earth together with his horses; the threshing-floor is still there. Every year, on St. Marina's Day, the Arcadians can hear the priest groaning: "Oh, Marina, oh!"

St. Marina died a martyr at Antioch in 262 A.D. and is held in great respect by the Greeks. Her feast-day coincides with the season when the grapes ripen, and it is celebrated by a general exodus to the vineyards and orchards, and by fruit-offerings in church. At Metrae, in Thrace, it was the custom in the old days to cut the first cluster of grapes on St. Marina's Day. This cluster was taken home in a basket without handles. At Kissos, in the Pelion area, figs are picked for the first time on St. Marina's Day.

The services and fairs held on this day always attract a large crowd; this is especially true of the service held in Athens at St. Marina's church near the Theseum, for this saint is especially worshipped in Athens as the protectress against smallpox. In some parts of Greece, as at Demati, in Epirus, an ox is sacrificed after the service at the expense of the whole community, so as to ensure health and happiness for all. The ox is cut into thirty or thirty-two pieces, which are distributed among the descendants of an equal number of families — this being probably the number of the first families to settle in the village. St. Marina also protects the faithful against noxious insects. On her feast-day the priest is asked to bless the house and the fields with holy water to keep insects away.

July 20th, the Prophet Elijah.

This is one of the most important festivals in July. The Prophet Elijah is considered the patron saint of rain, thunder and lightning. It is the Prophet Elijah whom the Cypriots invoke when they thresh and want a good strong wind. When there is lightning and thunder, it is thought to be the Prophet Elijah riding across the sky in his chariot, hunting the Dragon or the Devil with lightning for a weapon. Owing to this attribute, the Prophet Elijah is always worshipped on mountain-tops. This explains why so many peaks in Greece are called after him; a chapel is usually built there, dedicated to the Saint. The best known among these mountain chapels is the one on the peak of Mount Taygetus, near Sparta. On the Prophet's feast-day the inhabitants of the surrounding regions climb to the top of the high mountain and at dusk light a great fire into which they throw handfuls of incense, as an offering to the Prophet. Those who have remained in the villages in the plain keep their eyes fixed on the mountain-top until they see the great fire flickering in the distance; then they set fire to small heaps of grass and stubble, and dance round them or leap over them. The inhabitants of Polygyros, in the Chalcidice, constantly light bonfires from July 20th to September 1st and jump over them.

However, as Nikolaos Politis has already eloquently demonstrated, the cult of this Saint is merely a remnant of the religion of the ancient Greeks. The Prophet Elijah has simply taken the place of Zeus and Helios (the Sun). He has the same attributes as Zeus (Cloud-Gatherer and Sender of Lightning), but he is also closely related to the Sun, owing to the similarity of their names (*Ἡλίας*: Elijah, *Ἥλιος*: the Sun). Zeus, who was worshipped on mountain-tops as presiding over all weather phenomena, was frequently identified with Helios, because the Sun, when rising, appears

to be climbing over the mountains, and the peaks are the first to be touched by its rays. Therefore, with the coming of Christianity, mountain tops were considered the most suitable places of worship for the Prophet Elijah, since he gradually came to replace both pagan gods.

The origin of the Prophet's cult thus accounts for the custom of lighting fires on the mountain-tops on July 20th. It also explains another custom which has now died out: the sacrificing of cocks. For instance, at Almali, in Eastern Thrace, the person offering sacrifice to the Prophet did not kill his cock but set it free in the streets; the man who caught the cock was appointed sacrificer. The cock has always been considered the herald of Day, and for the ancient Greeks it was one of the symbols of the Sun. With the coming of Christianity the cock became associated with the Prophet Elijah, patron of rain; this is why farmers believe they can tell the weather from the crowing of a cock. There are also other ways of drawing weather forecasts on the Prophet's feast-day. The Cephalonians believe that, if the sky is clear at noon on July 20th, they will have a mild winter; if the sky is overcast, they will have a cold one. The inhabitants of Carpathos believe that if clouds settle over the mountain tops, or if the weather is generally cloudy on the eve of the Prophet's feast-day, there will be much rain and the crops will be good. The shepherds in Skyros pay special attention to the position in which their dogs lie down to sleep on this day; if the dog curls up with its head to the north or north-west, the winter will be very heavy; if its head is turned towards the south, they may expect a mild one.

Elijah was a prophet; it is natural that he should also be consulted about the future and the individual destinies of men and women. This is done in various ways: by examining the colour of the smoke rising from the incense burnt in the bonfires in honour of the Prophet; or by

examining the tiny patterns in a drop of oil placed against the sun. This is how it is done : on the morning of the Prophet's feast, at sunrise, one lights the little oil lamp hanging before the family icons, and dips the thumbnails into the oil; then one stands facing the sun and joins the two fingers together, so that the first sunbeams may be reflected in the oily surface of the nails, saying : "Holy Prophet Elijah, thou who dost prophesy and reveal what is to come in the world, please reveal my own fate and end." For instance, there is a story about a young girl who saw a lamb reflected in her fingernails, and married a shepherd. Another person saw a coffin, and died shortly afterwards.

The Greeks also invoke the Prophet's help to cure sickness. Various methods of invocation are used : a thin thread of wax is tied round the church during the liturgy; the thread is then tied round the sick person. An analogous practice, known as *περισχοινισμός*, is to be found among the customs of the ancient Greeks. In some villages a wheatstalk is used instead of a wax thread; the stalk is applied to the painful or diseased part (head, arm, stomach, etc.) and cut off abruptly during the service, in the belief that the pain will be severed from the body in the same way.

On July 20th, in the Greek villages of Eastern Rumelia a young bull used to be sacrificed by the community. Its meat was distributed to the peasants, and the sacrifice aimed at prevention from infectious diseases.

July 26th and 27th, the feasts of St. Paraskevi and St. Pantaleon.

There are two other July Saints who are also well-known healers and much beloved by the people : St. Paraskevi and St. Pantaleon. St. Paraskevi (feasted on July 26th) is especially good at curing eye-diseases. Hundreds of silver ex-votos representing a human eye can be seen adorning her icons. The icons usually show her dres-

sed in the black habit of a nun, with a wooden cross in her hands. The Greek countryside is studded with small chapels dedicated to St. Paraskevi. Large crowds from the neighbouring villages flock to her remote shrines on her feast-day; they all share a common meal after the service. St. Pantaleon (July 27th) is the patron-saint of invalids and cripples. The Church has officially named him the 'Healer' (*Iamatikos*), because he was a doctor by profession before being martyred. There is a popular proverb which says : "All blind men and all lame men go to St. Pantaleon." The Saint has various ways of practising his healing art. In the old days, at Kios in the Propontis, those who were in pain went to the church of St. Pantaleon, took an ex-voto from his icon and hung it before their own family icon. The ex-voto was kept there until the sick person was cured. When this happened, it was the cured person's duty to have a copy of the ex-voto made and hang both on the icon of St. Pantaleon in church.

III. AUGUST

August 1st.

August is the month when grapes, figs, melons and other fruit ripen, and when the farmers begin to receive the profits from their crops. It is therefore considered the richest month of the year : "August, my good month, if only you could come twice a year!"

But the joys of August are not always unmarred. It is also a month of fever and gastric diseases resulting from over-indulging in the fresh fruit of the season. In some parts of Greece August brings the first messages of winter; there are many popular sayings to this effect : "August has come — the first step of winter", or "Winter begins in August, summer in March," etc. For this reason August 1st is usually considered the beginning of a new season, and it is celebrated by

a number of customs known as '*rites de passage*'. For instance, on August 1st the inhabitants of Lesbos light bonfires wherever three roads meet, and leap over them, saying: "Welcome, August! Figs and walnuts and juicy grapes!" A head of garlic is thrown into the fire and eaten half-cooked as a protection against malaria. The inhabitants of the island of Tilos scatter some sand in their houses on the morning of August 1st to bring happiness and wealth to the family. The house is left unswept that day, for fear of throwing out the good fortune of the family together with the rubbish and dust.

Invocations and aspersions with holy water are also customary on this day, as on most first days of the month. In farmers' houses, after the aspersion the priest reads the prayer of St. Tryphon for the safety of the crops. A short service is also held in church; the villagers take away some holy water to sprinkle their vineyards and orchards. In some villages the priest also blesses the communal water reservoir. At Mesimvria it was the custom in the old days to sprinkle all the village-wells with holy water; the villagers then went out into the vineyards and made merry till evening. Nor were the dead forgotten on that day; at Kydoniae, every good housewife filled several plates with olives, some green and some black, and sent them to her poorer neighbours, in memory of the dead.

But August 1st marks above all the commencement of the fifteen-day fast in honour of the Virgin Mary, whose Dormition is celebrated on August 15th. This fast is strictly kept by the majority of Greeks, not only because the Virgin is held in particular honour in this country, but also owing to the season, which abounds in fruit and tomatoes, and thus makes abstention from meat easier. The beginning of the fasting period is celebrated with various fasting customs: cleansing of all copper cooking-pots, offerings of figs, grapes and other fruit at the church altar, etc. During this whole

fifteen-day period until the Virgin's Dormition early afternoon invocations are sung to Her in church. After the first invocation the priest distributes the fruit offerings to his fasting parishioners.

The weather is very variable during the first days of August; these days are therefore considered a propitious time for weather forecasting. In some places the villagers examine the sky during the first six days of August, in other places during the first twelve days — the weather signs observed on each day refer to the weather to be expected during the corresponding month; for instance, if the weather signs on the third day of August are favourable, it means that the weather will be good during the whole of the third month after August, etc.

The first days of August, like the first days of March, are called '*Drimes*' and are believed to be unfavourable to certain kinds of activity: it is advisable not to cut wood or wash one's hair on these days; many people also avoid bathing in the sea, and children are not allowed to stay out at noon. The *Drimes* usually include the first three, or nine, or twelve days of the month. But the prevailing belief is that the evil influence of the *Drimes* does not last beyond August 6th, which is the first great feast-day in August.

August 6th, the Transfiguration of the Saviour.

On this day it is the custom to bring the first baskets of grapes to church to be blessed. The grapes are then distributed among the congregation. The fast is broken, as on Annunciation Day and Palm-Sunday, and a special dish is prepared, usually cod or some other fish, cooked in various ways. No one is supposed to work on this day except fishermen, who are allowed to go out fishing in order to draw omens concerning the success of their calling during the rest of the year. Many Greeks believe that the heavens burst open

during the night from August 5th to August 6th and that any wish uttered at this moment will come true. For this reason many people sit up all night waiting to see the divine light.

August 15th, the Dormition of the Virgin Mary.

August 15th marks the end of the fifteen-day fast in honour of Our Lady. It is celebrated with special reverence in Greece. On this day pilgrimages are made to the two great shrines of Greek Orthodoxy; the first on the island of Tinos, the second on the island of Paros.

The church of St. Mary (*Evangelistria*) at Tinos owes its fame to a miraculous icon of the Virgin, which was unearthed in a field in 1821, following a mystical vision seen by one of the islanders. The numerous miracles worked by this icon, and especially the miraculous cures of dumb, lame and paralytic persons who have faith, have made this small island in the Aegean Sea a centre of Pan-Orthodox worship. Thousands of pilgrims from all over Greece, and even from the Near East, flock to Tinos on the two main feasts of the Virgin Mary: on the day of the Annunciation (March 25th) and on the day of Her Dormition (August 15th). However, as August is a more favourable time for sea-travel, the feast of the Dormition always draws a larger attendance. All the boats of the Greek coasting services are used for the transport of pilgrims, and the hotels, inns and guest-houses of Tinos are filled with visitors several days before the feast. Latecomers often find they have to sleep out of doors, in the fields, in the courtyard of the church, or under canvas.

This enormous concourse of pilgrims is not only due to the hope of a miraculous cure, but also to the vows made to Our Lady of Tinos in moments of danger or distress. These vows are usually made by women, and they vary considerably. Some women, invoking the Vir-

gin's help in a moment of crisis, promise that on August 15th they will go to Tinos and walk barefoot from the harbour to her shrine. Others promise to walk to her shrine with their hair loose on their shoulders, head uncovered, and hands crossed over the breast. It is not an unusual thing to see women making their way up the steep path that leads to the church on their bare knees. Other pilgrims promise to bring the Virgin various offerings: candles as tall as the donor, oil, wax, incense, silver candlesticks, censers, etc. The most common offering is a silver or gold-plated ex-voto representing the person who has been miraculously cured by the icon, or the cured limb itself, or a house, or a ship, for numerous are the seamen who invoke the name of Our Lady of Tinos during a storm.

The pilgrims stand in a long queue waiting for their turn to kiss the icon and hang their ex-voto. On the eve of the feast many pilgrims spend the night inside the church, while invocations are sung by the priest and cantors. On August 15th the service is followed by a solemn procession: the miraculous icon is carried round the town in great pomp, borne by the Bishop followed by the clergy and notables, including the representatives of the King and Government. A detachment of sailors marches at the tail of the procession; the Royal Hellenic Navy always sends a warship to Tinos on March 25th and August 15th. As the icon is carried round the town, many sick pilgrims lie down in its path so that the icon may pass over them. In addition to the crowd of followers, thousands of onlookers watch the procession on their knees, holding sticks of burning incense or lighted candles. A similar ceremony is held at St. Mary's church in the island of Paros (the *Ekatondapylani* or Church of a Hundred Gates), but with a smaller concourse of pilgrims. Finally, on the island of Patmos in the Dodecanese, at Kasiope in Corfu, August 15th is celebrated with an *Epitaphios*

recalling that of Christ on Good Friday: a symbolic bier is decorated with flowers and carried round the streets, followed by pilgrims holding lighted candles.

**August 25th, the feast of St. Dionysios,
patron saint of Zante.**

St. Dionysios, who lived in the island of Aegina and later became patron saint of Zante, is a comparatively modern saint. He was born and died in Zante in the 18th century, and his embalmed body is kept in a glass casket in the church of the same name on his home island. According to popular belief this Saint is always eager to help anyone who invokes his name, and for this reason he wears out his embroidered slippers so fast that they have to be changed every year by the Church Committee. His nameday is on December 17th, the day of his death, but winter makes it difficult for pilgrims to cross the sea and attend the open-air procession; for this reason he is also feasted on August 25th. Hundreds of pilgrims come to Zante from the neighbouring islands, from the Peloponnese and even from the mainland and follow the procession of the Saint's icon through the streets of the town.

August 27th, St. Phanurios' Day.

St. Phanurios is a very popular saint owing to the similarity of his name with the verb '*fanerono*': to reveal. He is the saint who reveals the place where lost objects are to be found; he also reveals what one's destiny is likely to be, and tells unmarried girls who will be their future husband. Icons always represent him holding a lighted candle in his hand. When one wants to find a lost object, one invokes the Saint as follows: "Good St. Phanurios, reveal the lost object to me, and I will render it to you in silver." In addition to the silver effigies of objects lost and found again,

the women who invoke his help also promise him a cake 'for the salvation of his mother's soul' (according to popular tradition, St. Phanurios' mother lived in sin). After having made this promise, the women often see the lost object in their dreams. Next day, they bake the promised cake (following a special recipe) and distribute it among the children of the neighbourhood, saying, "Take, and forgive the mother of St. Phanurios", or else they go out into the streets and offer a slice of cake to every passer-by; those who receive a slice reply: "May God forgive the mother of Saint Phanurios." Girls who wish to get married also promise Saint Phanurios a cake.

August 29th, in memory of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist (St. John the Faster or St. John the Beheaded).

The Gospel story of the beheading of St. John the Baptist, as represented on religious icons, has made such a deep impression on the popular mind that many people believe that the head of the Baptist may be seen emerging from the blazing disk of the rising sun on the morning of August 29th. Those who believe in this phenomenon (the Cypriots in particular) rise at dawn to see it happen.

The Greek people believe that Herodias' unholy crime has caused many evils to befall mankind. The pernicious fevers of August, which used to afflict the Greek country-side not many years ago, and the violent spasms and shivering fits that went with this disease are believed to be due to the terrible shock experienced by the Saint when he was beheaded. This belief is most vividly expressed in the words of a peasant of Lemnos: "From the day St. John was beheaded—from that day fever came to the world; his head quivered and shuddered with the shock, and since then we have these awful shuddering and quaking

fits. That's why a man suffering from fever must bring St. John some oil, candles, or incense."

For this reason the Saint is also called St. John *Thermologos* ('thermi': fever) or St. John Paroxysm, or the Feverish One. His memory is honoured by a strict fast and abstention from anything reminiscent of the blood that flowed from his head: black grapes, black figs, berries, or any other black-juiced fruit are forbidden, for it is the Saint's blood that dyed them black. It is also forbidden to eat walnuts, for the bone known as Adam's apple is called 'walnut' in Greek, and St. John's apple or 'walnut' was the first to be touched by the knife when he was beheaded; nor do people touch knives on this day; even bread is broken with the fingers (Kios).

In order to atone for the great crime committed against the Saint, those who suffer from fever promise him oil or candles, a cock or a goat to be sacrificed on the day he was beheaded. There also exist various practices for transferring the fever to trees or other objects. In the old days, at Adramition, the family of the sick person used to kill a cock or a goat, cut off its head, and let it hang on a fig-tree. In other villages it was the custom to pluck out a hair from the sick person's head and tear off a piece of the person's clothing, then hang both on a tree, preferably a willow bush. The goat or cock sacrificed on the feast of St. John the Beheaded was never eaten by the sacrificer himself or his family. They left it outside the house, and the person who found it was welcome to eat it.

Near the central market in Athens, there is a small old church named St. John of the Column. A fragment from an ancient column is kept inside the church; those who suffer from fever, malaria or other diseases causing shivering fits used to measure themselves from top to toe with a red thread, then tied the thread round the broken column, believing that in this way they would be cured.

SEPTEMBER — OCTOBER

September 1st.

September is the month of vintage and is commonly called 'the Vintager.' But it is also known as the month of the Cross, for the most important September festival is the day of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14th). In 313 A.D., September 1st was appointed as the beginning of the religious year; as a result, it is still celebrated as New Year's Day in many parts of Greece. A great number of people still believe that on this day the Angel of Death writes down the names of those who are fated to die within the coming year; this has caused September 1st to be called the 'Day of the Writer of the Book of Fate'. August 31st is called 'the end of the year'. The women of the island of Leros observe a typical custom on September 1st: on the eve of this day they place a table in the middle of the room and cover it with trays of sweetmeats, so that the good spirit which guards the house in the shape of a snake may come at night and eat, as they say.

As September 1st is considered the beginning of the year, it is a time when people wish each other happiness and prosperity. Farmers' families, anticipating the sowing-season, hang various symbols of abundance over their icon-stand or from the master-beam in the ceiling, and send a plate of seeds to church to be blessed by the priest. In the island of Cos these symbols usually consist of a wreath made of pomegranates, grapes, quinces, garlic and a leaf from Hippocrates' tree — an ancient plane-tree growing on that island. This wreath is called 'first of the year'. On Sep-

tember 1st, before sunrise, the village boys and girls go down to the seashore to throw away last year's wreath and dip the new wreath in the water; then they put forty pebbles and sea-water taken from forty waves in a bowl and take them home. On their way back, they put their arms round the ancient plane-tree of Hippocrates, in the hope that they may grow as hale and as old in years. The pebbles are placed in drawers and chests to keep mice away from clothes, and the sea-water is spilled at the four corners of the house as a protection against calumny and gossip. On September 1st, in the early morning, the women of Carpathos sprinkle the floors of their houses with fresh water and hang sprigs of sweet basil and other flowers and wreaths of pomegranate round the supporting pillars of the house, where they will remain all the year round. One of the pomegranates is burst open on the threshold, so that its seeds scatter all over the house. The Carpathians often decorate their houses with strings of quinces and apples; this is considered lucky. On the morning of September 1st, the priest goes from house to house wishing his parishioners a Happy New Year; he is offered honey-cakes. The inhabitants of Rhodes hang a small cloth bag containing wheat (the last handful of grain reaped from the fields) from the master-beam of their houses; round the little bag they hang walnuts, onions, garlic, millet, tufts of cotton and a cluster of grapes. Here too this wreath is called a 'first of the year'; no farm-work can begin before the wreath has been hung up. Another custom proper to September 1st is the exchanging of gifts between godparents and godchildren. In the old days in Carpathos mothers and sisters whose children had been baptized within the past year gave the child's godparents a basket filled with pomegranates, walnuts, quinces, figs, apples and other fruit. The godparents returned the basket with various gifts: clothes, silk kerchiefs, etc.

The most important religious festivals in September, from the point of view of folk lore, are the following:

September 2nd Saint Mamas' Day.

St. Mamas was a shepherd, and icons always show him holding a shepherd's crook. His feast-day is celebrated with offerings and sacrificing of lambs. In the island of Skyros the shepherds bring live lambs to his church, so that he may have a small flock of his own and not covet theirs.

September 8th, the Virgin's Birthday.

In many Greek villages the Virgin's birthday is celebrated with special services and processions. An auction is held for the privilege of carrying the Virgin's icon during the procession. In the island of Euboea the icon of the Mother of God is carried in pomp to the church of St. Anne on the eve of the feast. A short distance before the procession reaches the church, the priest pauses and cries: "Which good Christian will carry Her Beatitude in his arms to visit Her mother, so that She will not get tired?" The man who offers the largest sum of money is entitled to carry the icon to the church. The money from the auction is used for the purchase of a bull, to be eaten by all the villagers at a common meal. Another striking custom attached to this day is the 'sale' of sickly children to the Virgin Mary in order that they may get well. These children are called 'the slaves of Our Lady' and are bought back by their parents the following year.

September 14th, the Exaltation of the Cross.

This great Christian festival also marks a stage in farming activities. In some places it marks the beginning or expiration of servants' and shepherds' contracts. Summer

habits, like the siesta at noon and late evening meals, now come to an end. In the island of Aegina it is customary to 'bury' the *Deilinò* (Evening-meal) with loud lament in a kind of mimic-show which is probably of very ancient origin. This is also the day on which seamen renounce long journeys at sea, obeying the advice expressed in these two popular sayings: "On the day of the Cross, cross your sails and tie your ropes", and "On the day of the Cross, rest in harbour; on St. George's Day, rise and set sail again."

On the eve of this feast the village children are left free to go into the vineyards and orchards, and the flocks to graze in the fields of stubble. At nightfall the villagers light large bonfires made of bramble and sesame-twigs in the streets; as on other occasions, it is customary to leap over the bonfire for luck.

On the day of the Exaltation the priest distributes sprigs of sweet basil to his congregation, because tradition tells that a cluster of sweet basil sprouted on the spot where the Cross was found. A very strict fast is kept throughout the day, because during the morning service the priest reads the Gospel passage describing the Crucifixion, as on Good Friday.

The holiness of this day makes it a propitious occasion for the preparations of the sowing season—chiefly for the blessing and sprinkling with holy water of the seed to be used for sowing. A dish containing an assortment of seeds is therefore sent to the church to be blessed by the priest. We quote an example: On September 14th, the farmers of Ghalanades, a village on the island of Naxos, fill a towel with a few grains of barley, some beans, broad-beans and any other seed they intend sowing that year; they take these seeds to church and place them near the entrance to the sanctuary. Thus a small heap of seeds is gradually formed; the priest blesses the seed collectively at the end of the service. Then each farmer

steps forward and takes back his towelful of seeds. When the time for sowing comes, he mixes a handful of these consecrated seeds with the rest of his grain, saying: "Come, good Jesus and Mary, bring me wealth and good fortune." At Epidaurus the grain to be blessed by the priest on the morning of the Exaltation of the Cross is taken from the last measure of wheat reaped crosswise at the end of the harvest (see Harvest Customs).

Another typical custom observed on September 14th is preparing fresh yeast with holy water taken from the priest at the end of the service. The housewives of Lemnos, for instance, place a pitcher of water in the middle of the church, where the aspersion is to take place. This holy water then goes into making yeast for the whole year. The old yeast must all be used up during the previous week. At Koroni, in Messinia, a sprig of sweet basil taken from the church on the day of the Exaltation of the Cross is stuck in the fresh dough; during the night the dough ferments and turns to yeast by itself. This yeast must not be given away or lent to neighbours for forty days; the first loaf of bread made with this yeast is taken to church, blessed by the priest and distributed to the congregation. The inhabitants of Castoria make a special bread-dish (*bougatsa*) with this yeast instead of ordinary bread; in the *bougatsa* they conceal a small cross—a custom analogous to the coin hidden in the *vassilopitta* (see New Year customs). The *bougatsa* is then cut up in small pieces and shared among the neighbourhood. The housewife who gets the cross undertakes to supply *bougatsa* the following year.

Vintage Customs.

The beginning and end of vintage is celebrated with a number of interesting practices, most of which are of very ancient origin. In the old days, in Eastern Thrace

the vintage was considered a great festival in which all the villagers, men and women, old and young, must participate. The villagers picked grapes all day to the sound of musical instruments. There was a separate group of musicians for each vineyard. At sunset the vintagers returned home with songs and music, and found a well-laden table waiting for them. Eating, drinking, singing and dancing went on till midnight. Next day everybody had to be back in the vineyards. On the first vintage day the vintagers of Saranda Ekklesiës, in Thrace, used to gather in some open place or square, with several masqueraders, and dance until midnight with such frenzy that a casual observer might have thought himself among the ancient Greeks worshipping Bacchus, the god of wine. In the Rumeli area, when the vintage begins, friends, relations and neighbours all hasten to help the vineyard-owner pick the grapes, expecting no other reward but a few grapes. No vineyard-owner ever hires extra hands, because everyone is willing to lend a hand. The owner, however, is not ungrateful: he usually roasts a whole lamb on a spit for the vintagers and, before sending them home at night, he fills their baskets with grapes. Indeed, it is customary to offer grapes to anyone who happens to pass by the vineyard that day.

The trampling of the grapes is done in the vineyards, where special wine-presses are provided, or in the village. The trampling of the wine is always done by men; if women do it, the vine-growers believe the wine will turn sour.

The last day of the vintage is also an occasion for great festivities in Thrace. The last grapes are thrown into a large cart drawn by buffaloes. The cart can hold as many as 5000 lbs. of grapes. The buffaloes are crowned with wild flowers, and the vintagers' baskets and cases are hung at the sides of the cart. The cart, thus decorated, starts for the village, followed

by girls crowned with flowers, singing as they go. The musicians follow at the tail of the gay procession.

In Rumeli, when the time comes for the wine-must to be poured into the barrels, the vineyard-owner asks the priest to come to his vineyard and read a special prayer. He removes the spigot, fills a glass with must and offers it to the priest to be blessed; in return, the priest receives one or two okes of must. A few weeks later, usually on St. Demetrius' Day, when it is time to open the barrels, the priest is asked to come over once again to bless the casks. As soon as he has done so, a rubber tube is inserted into the barrel, and the first draught of new wine is drawn to the cries of "*Chrónia pollà!*" (many happy returns of the day).

The vintage closes the cycle of autumn festivals. No other festival worth mentioning occurs in late September and early October. In country and town, in the mountains and in the plains, everyone is making ready for winter, which is ushered in by the first great winter festival: St. Demetrius' Day (October 26th).

THE END

ILLUSTRATIONS



1. Sacrifice of a bull in a village of the north-eastern Thrace. Blessing of the victim by the priest (p. 144).



2. The sacrifice.

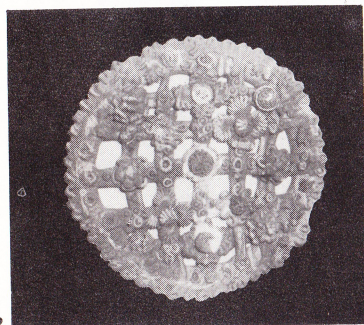


3. Procession of St. Spyridon's relic in Corfu (p. 26). (11th August 1956).

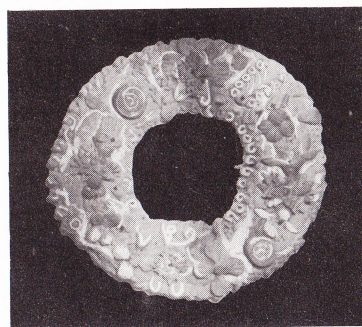


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1. Children singing Christmas carols (p. 27).
2. Decorated Christmas bread from Candia, Crete (p. 29).
3. Decorated Easter bread from Candia (p. 96).



2



3



The blessing of the sea on Epiphany Day in Piraeus :

1. General view of the port.
2. The ceremony of the throwing of the Cross into the sea (pp. 50-51).





1. A Groop of Mimmers, the «Rhogatsaria», from the Twelve Days of Christmas in Thessaly (1957) (p. 40).
2. An Arab mask of sheep-skin used by the «Rhogatsia» in the village Megas-Palamas, Thessaly (1958).
3. A mask of hare-skin used in Karaghiozi's wedding at Gonoussa (old Sicyon), Corinthia (1957).



2



3



1. Symbolic ploughing by a «Kalogheros» in the village of St. Helen on Cheese-Monday, 1952 (p. 65).
2. Four youths impersonating oxen and falling on the ground to bring good luck, as the villagers say (p. 65).



PLATE VI



Kite-flying and picnic in Athens on Clean Monday (p. 73).



PLATE VII



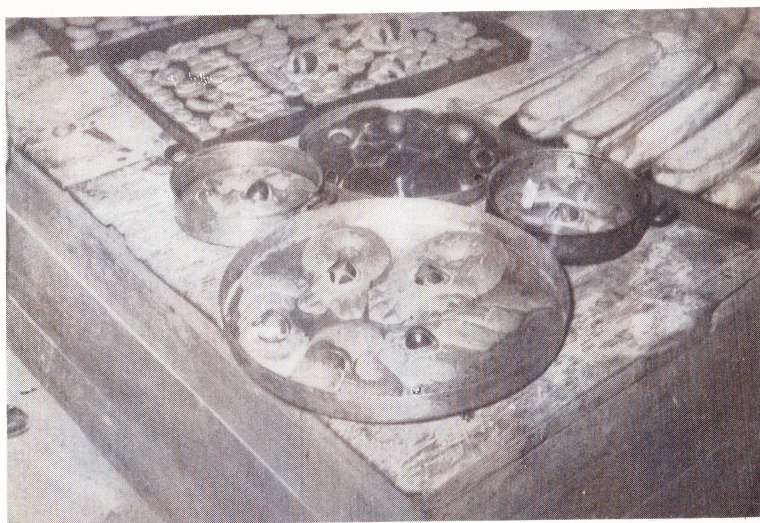
The «Peasant Wedding» at Thebes on Clean Monday (1954).



1. The nuptial dance. The bride, a man disguised in woman's cloths, is leading the dance (p. 74).

2. The Corpse (p. 74).

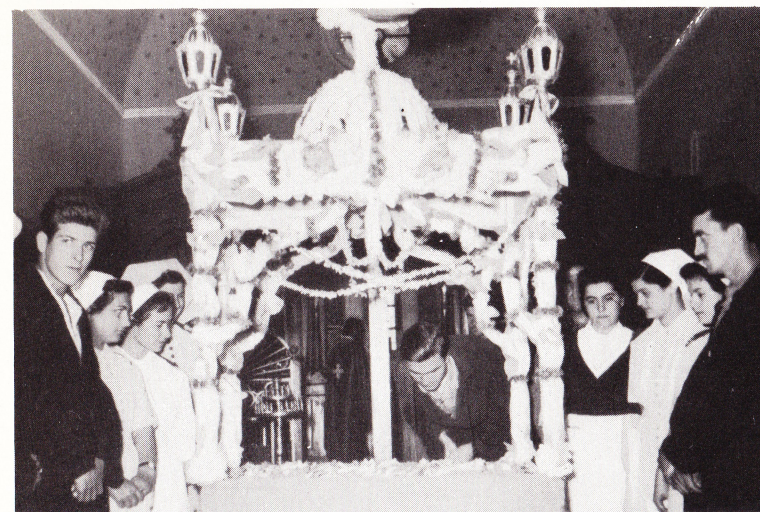
PLATE VIII



1. Easter buns and loaves (p. 96).
2. Easter «doll» bun from Paros (p. 96).
3. «Embroidered» Easter egg from Messenia (p. 94).



PLATE IX



1. Flower-decked Epitaphios in the church of a hospital (p. 100).
2. The «Gardens of Adonis». Good Friday at Serres, 1954 (p. 102).



PLATE X



1. Easter dancing at Leonidion in the Peloponnesus (p. 114).
2. The dance of the «Trata» in the square at Megara (p. 114).



PLATE XI



1. St. George's Day at Arachova, near Delphi. People racing to reach the lamb which is on the top of the hill (p. 114).
2. The roasting of a lamb on a spit at Arachova, near Delphi (p. 109).





The ceremony of the «Anastenaria» in the village of St. Helena, Serres (21st May 1953). The Anastenarides dance barefoot on live coals, holding icons or the Gospel, while others play various instruments (p. 124).



Child leaping over a bonfire on St. John's Day (23rd June 1954) (p. 134).



The Fair of Tinos on 15th August. The miraculous icon is carried round the town in great pomp and also over the sick (p. 149).



1



2

1. The custom of «Fouskodendri» or funeral lamentation in the spring, at Kastanià, Stymphalia, Spring 1951 (p. 119).
2. «Leidinos», symbolic funeral. Aegina, 14th September 1953 (p. 156).
3. «The first of the year», a symbol of abundance, Cos (p. 153).
4. The dipping of the new wreath in the water, Cos (pp. 153-4).

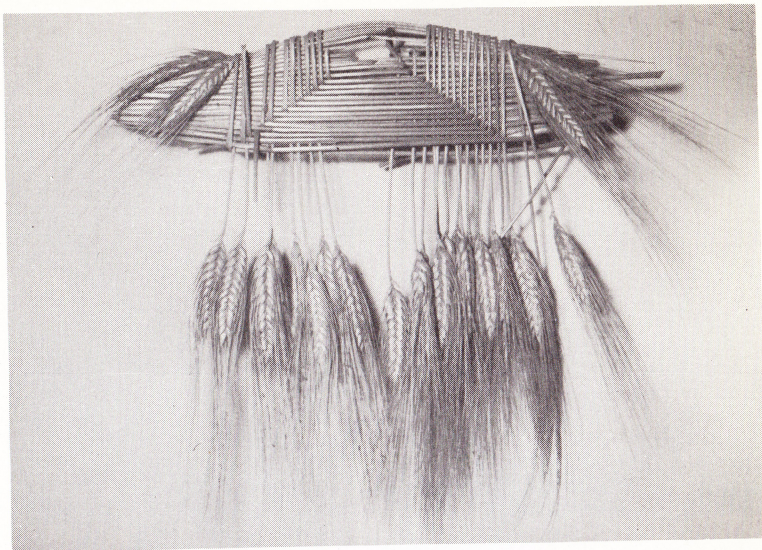


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PLATE XVI



1. «Kteni» or «Psathi», the last sheaves reaped made into a large cross or comb, or woven like straw (p. 132).
2. From the vintage celebrations at Markopoulo, Attica (p. 158).



their highest aspects, nor do the rustic customs belong to the higher strata of religion. But they are near the bedrock of primitive ideas and they have survived the high gods, lasting on into our own day in Greece, as very similar forms of religion have in other European countries». It is thus natural that the author, in his book, should devote more space to the description and interpretation of the religious customs of the peasantry and shepherds than to those of the urban class. It should be noted that the festive customs of the inhabitants of the towns in Greece do not differ essentially from those of the inhabitants of the rural districts, from which the majority of the urban population originally came ; only that the meaning of these observances has become transformed owing to the difference in the conditions of life between town and country.

In placing the present work before the students of Greek folkore and all those who feel a friendly interest in Greece and her people, we are glad to be able to reveal to the public abroad a section of the priceless treasure-house of Greek popular customs and traditions.

